

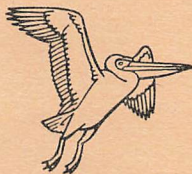
*Belmont H. Carlson*

PELICAN BOOKS

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THE CHURCH TODAY

J. W. C. WAND







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*The Church Today*

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John William Charles

J. W. C. WAND, Bp. of London, 1885

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## PREFACE

THIS book is an effort to describe in general terms the present situation of the world-wide Church. My instructions were to interpret the term Church as widely as possible but to describe the situation as seen through Anglican eyes. The method adopted has involved a certain amount of repetition, for which I apologize.

I have tried to be as non-technical as possible, but I found that I could give no coherent picture without some reference to past history and some discussion of points of theology. Even so my aim has still been to be descriptive rather than argumentative.

Inasmuch as the Church, in its temporal aspect, is an organization, questions of external growth and administration must loom large in any adequate account of it. But what is of lasting importance is its inner life, and it is to that that I should wish this little book to be an introduction.

† *Wm Wand*

*St Paul's*

*31 March 1959*



## CHAPTER ONE

### *Introductory*

TODAY there can be few more exhilarating topics on which to write than the Church of the Living God. After a long period of eclipse the idea of the Church is coming again into its own. The climate of theological opinion is thoroughly favourable to the notion of a Christian organization. After flirting, in the interests of a supposed spirituality, with the idea of an invisible church, theologians of almost all schools have come to the conclusion that, whatever value may lie in unorganized piety, it is no proper substitute for the organism of a visible church, and that the latter is indigenous to the teaching of Christianity, an essential element in Christian faith.

Not only the theologian but the statesman also has awakened to a new interest in the Church. He has recognized it as a one-time bulwark against the Hitlerite tyranny in Germany and believes that it still represents the most durable corrective of communist despotism in Europe and elsewhere. An organization of such toughness commands his respect, and he is no longer unwilling to enquire into the nature of a social organism which he had begun to think obsolescent.

What the theologian and the statesman think today the general public thinks tomorrow. Already the preacher in the pulpit is beginning to find that ears are not closed to him when he discourses on the Church. If the man in the street does not see much beyond the newspaper headlines, the man in the pew is recovering a lost interest. Even those who like only 'practical' sermons realize that here is no mere piece of unnecessary dogma foisted upon them by ecclesiastical pretension, but that it is something that may be of immense importance in their everyday life. News from the concentration camps and police trials combine with their own deepening experience to make them feel that this, so far from being a dry-as-dust point of doctrine, is a living reality in which they are immediately concerned. It is not merely

that there is here evidence of a fellowship among Christians which sets them apart from the world, but there is also suggestion of an innate strength of character that cannot be found elsewhere.

In addition to all this, there is the undoubted fact that Christians of most types are drawing nearer together. After five hundred years of growing disunion and increasing sectarianism, the various denominations have begun to show an unexpected willingness to cooperate with one another. In some instances indeed cooperation has gone to the length of assimilation and amalgamation. This unfortunately has led to inflated hopes in some quarters, in which the depth of the differences that still divide the churches is not fully appreciated. A consequence may be a sense of frustration and exasperation when these premature hopes are not fulfilled. If the danger is not foreseen and avoided, the result may well be reaction and a fresh widening of the breaches. Nevertheless the present signs are propitious. We are on the crest of a wave: we cannot yet tell how far forward we may be carried.

In such circumstances a fresh discussion of the Church may be not only enlivening but pragmatically useful. It has been frequently said in ecumenical circles that we cannot get any further in our efforts towards *rapprochement* until we have made up our minds about the doctrine of the Church. That the different denominations mean different things by the term 'Church' is sufficiently evident from the fact that they have such different polities. The fact that there is now such general agreement that Jesus and his apostles did originally contemplate one visible society has served to bring into stronger relief than ever the anomaly of these differences of constitution. It is clear that the next step, after deciding that from the start there was projected only one visible society of Christians, is to decide what kind of society that was intended to be. 'We cannot settle details until we know what we mean by the Church.'

Here, however, we are interrupted. Theology, we are told, is not divided into water-tight compartments. Each article of belief depends on every other: you cannot define any one of them



adequately without getting back to the fundamentals on which all depend. The most essential of all articles is belief in God. It is alleged that differences about the Church ultimately stem from differences about God. The churches differ in their constitutions because they differ in their views about the supreme Deity. Therefore, it is said, 'we cannot settle what we mean by the Church until we know what we mean by God.'

This may seem a harsh and extravagant view to take, and too much weight should not be attached to it. Nevertheless it is not entirely devoid of basis in reality. If we take for instance two clearly defined and different interpretations of Christianity, the Calvinist and Roman, we can see how differences in the theology of the Church correspond to divergencies in the views of God. Calvinism emphasizes the gulf between God and his creation and is often accused of rank dualism. The result is a doctrine of the Church which, to the outsider at least, seems cold and austere and is reflected in the characteristic bareness of the buildings. The Roman view is by contrast incarnational and sacramental, emphasizing the unity of God with man and reflecting itself in the intimate warmth and colour of its church furnishing.

Obviously one must begin somewhere. We cannot range over the whole realm of theology in dealing with one particular element. But since the question has been raised we cannot avoid stating briefly the view of God from which we start.

We take it for granted that God is in some sense a *Deus absconditus*, a God who hides himself. We cannot know all there is to know of God because of the essential difference between his nature and ours. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite.

Thou comest not, Thou goest not,  
Thou wert not, wilt not be.  
Eternity is but a thought  
By which men think of Thee.

Nevertheless the fact that we cannot know God altogether does not mean that we cannot know him at all. On the contrary we believe that the infinite love that led God to create the universe led him also to reveal himself as completely as possible to

the men he had placed within it. For the purposes of such revelation he would need an adequate agent. If he left himself not altogether without witness in the beauty of nature, the movement of history, the holiness of the moral law, he revealed himself with completeness and certainty in the incarnation of his Son. Subsequent ages have always had the opportunity of seeing the glory of God reflected in the face of Christ. By the same token it was through the incarnate Son that man was redeemed from the slavery into which he had fallen. Of that slavery universal experience is evidence. It was through Jesus that the demands of justice were met, humanity was released, and men were given power to become, and to behave as, 'sons of God'.

If such agency was necessary for the work of revelation and redemption at a particular period of world history, it was because a new dispensation was then begun. Nevertheless it was in some sense at least the continuation and culmination of the age-long method pursued by God in his self-revelation to mankind. The way in which he used a nation for that end is shown in the history of the Jewish church and people. Jesus himself said that he came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfil. It was hardly likely therefore that the method would be altogether abandoned at his death. God would still use a community as his chosen instrument. The Church was the heir of Christ as agent of this double task of revelation and redemption. It continued, as far as was necessary and possible under the altered circumstances, the work of Christ after his disappearance from this visible world. How it still does this, we must consider in detail later. But what we have said should be enough to show that a doctrine of the Church flows naturally from a Christian doctrine of God.

What is of immediate importance is to decide the point from which we shall start and the lines along which we shall pursue the discussion. The normal method is to start from the centre, the very heart and core of the Church's existence in Christ, and to work outwards towards a consideration of its influence in the secular sphere. It might be a little more intriguing if on the present occasion we inverted the procedure, started from the



outer circle and worked in towards the centre. Perhaps we might suggest that there are really three main concentric circles. The outermost is the social work of the Church. The next is its constitution and organization. The innermost is its devotional life and spirituality. At the centre of all, radiating his beneficent vitality through the whole, is of course Christ himself.

PART ONE

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The Church in Society

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Public Welfare*

WE begin on the perimeter of our farthest circle with the social work of the Church down the ages. The use of this metaphor prompts us to one word of caution at the outset. It is not to be taken as implying that 'good works' are a mere optional appendage to the Church's life. They are indeed 'stuff of the very stuff', as will be implicit in all that follows.

Dr Garbett, when Archbishop of York, told a story that is particularly illuminating in regard to this aspect of our subject. He was visiting one of his northern towns and was engaged with the Mayor on some welfare function. When their duty was completed, they fell into conversation; before they parted the Mayor said to him, 'You know, Archbishop, before I took up this job I had no idea that it was *your* people who were behind most of the good works of this town.'

His Worship was certainly not peculiar in his ignorance. Even when the good work is recognized, the motives that inspire it are often impugned. Once during the Second World War I was about to enter a large restaurant that we had opened in an Australian city for the benefit of the troops. Passing it at the moment were three young civilians. One of them pointed to our sign and said to the others, 'Why do they do it?' 'Oh, I don't know,' replied the oldest of them, 'self-advertisement, I suppose.' Without letting them know that I had overheard the remark, I asked them if they would like to look round. They were obviously surprised at the size of the undertaking, at the number and cheapness of the meals we provided. They questioned me as to the number of people who were being paid for their work there, and were suitably impressed when I told them that the only paid worker was the cook, all the others being voluntary helpers supplied in relays by the various parishes of the city.

These incidents are trivial in themselves, but they serve to reveal a wide-spread ignorance of the extent and nature of the



Church's work in the world. Yet there is really little excuse for that ignorance. Concern for the welfare of others is fundamental in the Christian life. It springs from the basic rule of *agape*, or love, by which Jesus sought to regulate the conduct of his followers. This love, as we cannot be too often reminded, was no mere sentiment or emotion but the set determination to seek the highest good of all, whether friend or foe. As such it has always been the primary requirement of the Christian in his attitude towards his fellow-men.

This requirement is universal for all Christians. Here at least we have no need to discriminate between one kind of Christian and another. Nor need we ask to what part of the Church it applies, as if it did not apply to the rest. Indeed in this section of our enquiry we can justifiably follow the rather charming habit of Australian journalists in using the term 'Church' to cover all Christians in general. Not infrequently the newspapers will appear with a banner headline announcing the views of the 'Church' on some matter or other and below will be given the opinions of Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Non-conformist leaders side by side.

It has never been denied, of course, that Christians owe a special duty of love to each other. 'Love of the brethren' was always regarded as something distinct from the general love that was owed to all and sundry.<sup>1</sup> In this the Church was thoroughly realistic, just as it was in recognizing the special claims of the family. Everyone was expected to have particular regard to the needs of his own dependents. The Church was regarded as the family writ large, and its members had a particular obligation to support one another. Just as the duty of hospitality is specially incumbent on a pioneering community, which must always be ready to provide food and shelter against the pressure of untamed nature, so the virtue of mutual love and service was specially required among the members of the early Church in the face of a hostile and often persecuting environment.

Nevertheless this *agape*, which was first owed to the family and the Church, must always be allowed to overflow to those who were without. Wherever there was need, there must be a



ready response. According to Tertullian this characteristic was early recognized by their pagan neighbours who were wont to say, 'How these Christians love one another.' It is well-known that Julian, the apostate Emperor, trying to raise the prestige of the pagans, urged them to imitate Christian works of charity. Those works were illustrated in the horror expressed by the author of the *Letter to Diognetus* at the exposure of children,<sup>1</sup> in Ambrose's<sup>2</sup> efforts to raise money in order to buy back from slavery prisoners taken in war, in Augustine's<sup>3</sup> humane revulsion against the cruelty of gladiatorial shows, in the charitable institutions founded by Basil the Great<sup>4</sup> which grew to such an extent as to overshadow the capital city of Caesarea. All this was in the first four centuries.

During the Dark Ages it was the development of such care for the unfortunate that helped to usher in a more enlightened period. During the Middle Ages responsibility for the welfare, physical as well as mental and spiritual, of the greater part of the population was almost a monopoly of the Church. The effect of the Renaissance and Reformation was to shift some of the responsibility to the shoulders of secular governors, who on the whole were unable or unwilling to undertake the task. This is not to suggest that none but Christians ever recognized the need. During the age of the Enlightenment the Encyclopedists uncovered some scandals and furthered some reforms, particularly in the provision of hospital treatment. Even so it was religiously-minded people who were generally left to do the work. It is one thing to have the perspicacity to see where reform is needed: it is quite another thing to have the patience, perseverance, and love to work day and night year in and year out to make the reform effective. It should hardly need saying that, where personal need is concerned, no incentive has ever been discovered to compare with Christian love in keeping the would-be helper faithful to his task of alleviation.

1. Pagans regularly exposed unwanted children. The writer of the *Letter to Diognetus* makes it a point of his defence of the Church that Christians never countenanced such a practice.

2. Bishop of Milan.

3. Bishop of Hippo.

4. Bishop of Caesarea.

There is no more conspicuous example to be found of this process than in the sphere of education. It would be safe to say that western civilization is founded upon the teaching provided by the Christian Church. The original schools were closely associated with the cathedrals and great churches, most of which maintained chaplains for the purpose of training the young. The ancient universities had a similar ecclesiastical foundation, and when monasticism had lost its first appeal the money that might have gone into strictly 'religious' institutions went to further religious education in schools and colleges.

In modern times it was still the Church that pioneered the way to the education of the masses. No one thought of universal education till religious leaders showed the way. Even as late as the early nineteenth century the state in England had no schools. The National Society that was founded in 1811 and started schools for elementary education all over the country was an Anglican organization. Non-conformity developed the same work according to its means. It was only the practical impossibility of raising sufficient revenue on the voluntary principle, if education was to be truly universal, that made recourse to the state necessary. In the end, of course, the State has had to take over the main responsibility, because it alone can raise money by taxation. But, whatever may be true of the general population, the educational authorities at least are fully aware what the country owes to the Church. For this reason they have taken pains in the latest Education Acts to ensure that religious and secular claims shall alike be adequately recognized in our educational system.

The partial, but perhaps inevitable, supersession of the Church by the State in the educational sphere is an example of what has happened, at least in this country, throughout the main area of what used to be known as charitable work. People are no longer willing to be indebted to charity. Under our modern notions the State is responsible for the welfare of every individual citizen. This of course is a tremendous advance. It means that it is no longer left to the spasmodic efforts of private charity to provide schools, hospitals, financial relief, care for the aged. Almost all



that the Church has done in the past for the support of the people is now done, and often more efficiently done, by the State. It ought not however to be forgotten that this development is in the main due to the Church. It is unlikely that the State would have arrived at this idea of its proper functions so soon had it not been for the teaching and example of the Church. In any case it is certain that the Church blazed the trail. The Welfare State is possible today only because the Church had prepared the way for it.

It is sometimes thought that, now the Welfare State has arrived, there is no longer need for the charitable work of the Church. Such a supposition is very far from the truth. One acknowledges with deep thankfulness that much that used to be done by the Church is now done through the agency of the State by the people for themselves, and one has tried to show that Christian influence has been a large factor in making such a result possible. But this does not mean that the millennium has already arrived. We are very far from perfection even on the organizational level. The wheels of the machinery creak badly from time to time, and the net is too coarse-meshed to catch all the cases of need. Not only must the Church continue to do its ambulance work for those who, for one reason or another, fail to qualify for state-provided benefits, but it must also inspire with the right spirit those who administer relief of every kind. If the old method earned the criticism implied in the phrase 'as cold as charity', everyone knows and condemns the bored and haughty aloofness that is often associated with bureaucracy. In the last resort it is character that counts most in all human relationships and it is the formation of character that is the special *métier* of religion.

This is why the happiest results are attained when State and Church work hand in hand, a fact that is becoming more widely recognized on both sides. While some local government agencies are overweeningly proud of their new-found powers and try to keep their religious counterparts at arm's length, others recognize that their legal machinery requires a humanizing spirit to make it work adequately and are consequently glad to enlist the help of the clergy and their lay supporters. Anyone who has seen

the happy results achieved by this kind of partnership in the work among old people in the east end of London would wish that it could be made universal.

An even more conspicuous example of the continued need of the Church's social work is to be seen at the other end of the age scale. Few people realize how many children there are who have to be cared for by others than their parents. In this task the religious agencies have conferred undoubted benefits of considerable magnitude, both upon the individual and upon the nation. The organization I know best, the Church of England Children's Society, has had for many years past an annual average of nearly five thousand children under its care, and it is by no means the largest of such religious undertakings in the country. As far as possible it tries to provide means so that the children may be cared for in their own homes. Where that fails it tries to find suitable foster-parents or looks after the children in its orphanages. It was the pioneer in arranging for the adoption of such children, and by this means it has brought untold happiness into the lives of many childless couples, as well as to children who might otherwise have lacked that sense of belonging to a family, which is the secure background and framework of normal human life.

Supposing one were to replace all this personal and devoted care with some impersonal government agency, how irreparable would be the loss. This is not to say that all government agents are or need be cold and ruthless. But it must be obvious that every benefit conferred by government must be on a legal basis. What is done by the Church rests primarily upon the basis of personal character. Red tape and administrative machinery are reduced to a minimum. It is the human touch that matters, and so long as that is the case there will always be need for the social work of the Church.

An interesting illustration of this general truth is provided by the recent history of the organizations generically known as 'east end settlements', which are to be found not only in the east end but in other crowded areas of London and the greater provincial cities of this country. Originally these settlements were founded by Public Schools, Universities, or other well-to-



do patrons for social work among the poorer elements of the population. They were intended to give members of the 'upper classes' an opportunity of personal service among their less fortunate neighbours, and they were founded upon a definitely religious basis. Between the wars it was felt that, while the need for social work remained, the religious need was not nearly so obvious. As a result there occurred in many instances a conscious or unconscious secularization of the institutions. With the advent of the Welfare State even the social work began to seem less necessary. Consequently where the religious incentives had been lost there seemed little remaining for the settlement to do. Today the importance of the religious element in the life of these places is once again becoming fully recognized. Under its inspiration the workers are cooperating fully with local government under the facilities afforded by the Welfare State, and the settlements are entering upon a new stage of extended usefulness. This development is all the more interesting because there is now no question of patronage of the poor by the rich, no suspicion of 'slumming' by superior people, no relation *de haut en bas*, but a genuine effort towards a common sharing of life and experience by people who, though coming from different environments, are brothers and sisters in Christ. So the social work of the Church, always needed, adapts itself down the ages to the changing needs of successive generations.

At this point, and before we proceed to the next chapter, it would be well to insert a warning. It is sometimes assumed that because the Church expends so much of its energies in welfare work, this is its primary purpose. Such a conclusion would be a grave mistake. As we shall see later, the Church's main task is something quite different from that of making men as happy and comfortable as possible within the terms of their residence in this world. As Jean Daniélou says in his *Lord of History*, 'It is certainly our duty to attack social wrong and economic distress, but these are only the symptoms of a more deep-seated evil.' The Church must go down to the root of the disease from which society suffers. How it does so we must consider before we come to the end of this discussion. In the meantime, however, it is important to realize how much the Church has always

done to alleviate the temporal lot of mankind. Those who are wont to compare the later efforts of the Church unfavourably with those of her Master would do well to ponder the following words of Archbishop William Temple:

In scale, if not in quality, the works of Christ wrought through His disciples are greater than those wrought by Him in His earthly ministry. It is a greater thing to have founded hospitals all over Europe and in many parts of Asia and Africa than to have healed some scores or some hundreds of sick folk in Palestine; and it is to the Spirit of Christ at work in the hearts of men that we owe the establishment of hospitals.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Readings in St John's Gospel*, p. 235.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Church and Culture*

IN considering the place of the Church in the world we have taken first the example of social welfare, because that is on the surface of existence and comes most clearly under everyone's observation. But the Welfare State itself is evidence of an influence that goes very deep. It is the natural consequence of the permeation of European culture by Christianity. How far that permeation has gone may be judged from the popular phrase that describes the culture of the west as 'Christian civilization'. As all are ready to admit, that phrase needs some qualification. But like most popular sayings it represents a truth, if not the whole truth; and if we are to understand fully the meaning of the Church, we must enquire into its exact force more closely.

By culture we mean the elements of his common life that man has provided for himself, as distinct from what is provided for him by nature. The form that he imposes upon them differs from country to country and from age to age, so that we get a variety of differing cultures. No age of man is without its culture, for even when he is so primitive that his artifacts are few, he already has some means of communication, some kind of language, and some way of impressing himself on his surroundings; all of which imply the beginnings of a culture. It is always a fascinating pursuit to compare the cultures of different ages and different countries with each other, and in any individual case to analyse the components that go together to make up the whole. With regard to Europe it is often said that its culture has been affected by three main influences: Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian ethics. To these three we should certainly have today to add modern science and technology.

It is however on the Christian strand in this texture that our attention is at the moment riveted. Here we are met with a difficulty. It is often said that the Church has always stood aloof

from the world, that Christians have always been warned to avoid the contamination of the age in which they live, that even religious learning must be sharply opposed to secular. 'What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?' has been the cry not of Tertullian<sup>1</sup> alone but of many Christian teachers. If Christianity is thus opposed to culture, how can it be said to have influenced the development of culture – or indeed ever hope to do so?

In the first place the allegation of an opposition between Christianity and culture is only partly true; it is true to the same extent and only to the same extent, as it would be to say *per contra* that Christianity accepts the current culture of the world. The attempt to include the Church totally in either the world-renouncing or the world-accepting religions is doomed to failure. The fact is that Christianity both accepts and renounces the world. It accepts the world as it came from the hands of its Creator, who looked on everything he had made and saw that it was good. It rejects it in so far as it has been corrupted by man's sin, which has crept into everything human beings have made and has spoilt every element of their culture. Consequently there is only one thing left for the Church to do. If it cannot wholly reject or wholly accept the world, it must transform it.

This is precisely what the Church in history has attempted to do. It remembers the parable of its Master in which he described it as the leaven intended to leaven the whole lump of dough. Throughout the ages it has acted as an influence within society, sometimes with much and sometimes with little effect, but always endeavouring to mould the culture of the time according to the pattern revealed in the teaching of its Founder. It is true that in its early years it found the doors of society closed against it. It had to face the prevailing hostility, and the occasional persecution, first of the Jews and then of the Roman Empire. But even during this period its teaching was not wholly ineffective. As we have discovered in more recent times, you cannot dam up ideas behind locks and bars. Even opponents are to some extent affected by the very ideas they seek to suppress, and here and there an occasional convert is won.

1. The celebrated N. African teacher and founder of Latin theology in the late second century.



Naturally enough the greatest change effected by the Church in its early years was precisely in the sphere of men's thinking. Gordon Leff<sup>1</sup> assures us that four new points were introduced into the thought of the day.

The first was that God was the sole self-existing being in his own right, not a mere absolute, much less a rather exalted being in some thickly inhabited pantheon, but a concrete person, whose individuality was so much richer than ours that it could only be described as tri-personal.

The second was that this God was both the creator and the sustainer of the universe. Nature had not just happened, it was deliberately planned and existed under the guidance of a personal Providence who cared for every detail in its existence.

Thirdly, this involved the idea of history. There was a goal and purpose in existence, and an ultimate judgement in which moral values would form the criterion.

Lastly, man would find himself on the right side in this judgement in so far as he was united with Christ both in will and in being. This unity could be effected not by man's own effort but only by the free gift of grace. Christ who had himself proved victor over sin and death would guarantee a similar victory for all who were thus made one with him.

These ideas spread through the Roman Empire until they effected a complete change in the average man's attitude of mind.

So in spite of all opposition the influence of the Church grew until, early in the fourth century, the Emperor himself was at least nominally converted, persecution ceased, and Christianity began to affect even the legislation of the Empire. Much cruelty was stopped; there was a new reverence for human life; and the new religion began to find expression not only in enriched liturgical services but in the arts such as architecture, painting, and designing. Further the Church became the heir of the intellectual treasures of Greece. She employed them both in her worship and in the explication of her creed. Once the Church recognized how much she owed to Greek teachers, she preserved

1. *Medieval Thought: St Augustine to Ockham* (Pelican Books) 1958, pp. 17-19.

their texts at Byzantium. In Rome the very continuance of the common life was due to the Church, which during the barbarian invasion took over many of the duties of government. Then in the new settlement of Europe the Church handed on to the fresh inhabitants, through the medium of Latin law and tongue, such intellectual and moral gains as she had won from the past.

Throughout the Middle Ages the Church shared with the secular authorities the privileges of power, and in return for the precedence generally accorded her managed to produce a façade of unity, covering the whole of public life, which was certainly imposing, but concealed the incipient fissures that led to ultimate disruption. While it lasted, the medieval experiment was one of the most interesting adventures in the human story. Many historians regard the thirteenth century as the greatest the world has ever known. We who have seen so many attempts at unity fail in our day must look back with admiration on the amount of unity then secured upon the basis of faith. Nor in describing the period as the Age of Faith must we forget that it was also an Age of Reason. The intellectual ability of the scholastic philosophers was of a very high order. Indeed, competent judges are sometimes heard to declare that that period was the truly scientific age and that compared with it the present age ought simply to be called the Age of Invention.

While we recognize the great part played by the Church in the development of culture during the Middle Ages we cannot disguise from ourselves that the crash, when it came, was due not only to the divisive tendencies already observable in medieval society, but very largely to the moral delinquencies of leading churchmen and to their criminal stupidity in not recognizing new light and learning when it came. There had for some time been a revival of interest in the life and thought of ancient Greece. Constantinople had released the Greek texts it had so carefully stored. The result was seen in the injection of a new vital stream into the hardening arteries of Europe. New geographical discoveries, new developments in art, new theories in science made man feel that he was the master of things. In Italy especially the men of the new age were intoxicated by the new sense of freedom and adventure, which they associated with pagan classicism.



Unfortunately the Popes themselves were not free from this intoxication. They failed to see that the rebirth applied as much to the study of the scriptures and the early history of their own religion as to other departments of knowledge.

That note of seriousness, when imparted to the New Learning in the countries of northern Europe, converted the Renaissance into the Reformation. The latter movement arose out of a curious compound of secular and ecclesiastical interests. It would be a mistake to belittle the strictly religious element in it, and to speak as if the driving forces behind it were just political and economic. It was quite definitely a movement of the Church in the wide sense in which we are using the term at present. In fact, using another type of current phraseology, we might say that it was the religious movement which turned the Church into the churches. In any case it still had a profound effect on culture.

Perhaps the main influence of the Reformation upon contemporary civilization was exercised not through any changes in ecclesiastical polity, however important they were, but in the tremendous stress laid upon vernacular versions of the Bible. It was not that the Bible had been hitherto unknown. Its stories had been told in carving, painting, and glass-work. But it had been inaccessible to the average person and its contents had been mediated to the faithful through the teaching of the Church. Now the scholar's interest in the Greek text communicated itself with all the force of a revelation to those who found the new printing presses putting vernacular versions into their own hands. For many 'Christianity became the religion of a book and that book the Bible.' For generations the Bible formed the main reading of many of the people of Europe. Particularly was that the case in Britain, where the King James version spoke directly to the heart of the reader. The Englishman understood its language; he appreciated its sentiment; he tried to guide his conduct by its precepts, not distinguishing very clearly between the Old and New Testaments; he even thought he could find in its pages a clear indication of the one true and proper organization both of Church and State.

Fortunately or unfortunately the majority of readers could not square what they thought they found in the Bible with the

ecclesiastical situation as they saw it around them. Revolt against the established order was inevitable. There was, however, no universal agreement as to the precise order that should replace it. All accepted the Bible as the word of God, but they were not agreed as to its instructions in the sphere of Church polity. Hence arose the variety of denominations and the consequent dissection of the Church. Two effects, however, this recourse to the Bible had upon the British character. It made for a decided independence, which has been one of the main causes of our national strength. And, chiefly through the prevailing fondness for the Old Testament, it left behind a certain Puritanism which has been a main constituent of our moral character and has closely affected our art and culture. All this of course took place within the general framework of Christianity. There was little disagreement about the basic doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. To that extent the movement, however violent, was a movement within the 'Church': it was a reform rather than a revolution.

Today we are beginning to reach a situation in which we can calmly assess the consequences of the change that was initiated in the sixteenth century. One of its less desirable results has been a loosening of the ties that bound people to the organized Church. Nevertheless, at least in our own country, there has been a great deal of diffused Christianity. It would be a mistake to assess the influence of the Church merely by the number of people who regularly attend its services.

Similarly it is likely that today there are fewer people who regularly read the Bible, at least in the Authorized Version. Its language appears archaic and even those who are brought up to love its cadences are no longer so sure that they can explain precisely what it means. Nevertheless, our own generation has seen an almost embarrassing number of translations into the modern idiom. Judging from the publishers' returns these are widely read, and it may be concluded that, like the Church itself, the scriptures have a widely diffused influence even among those who have no very obvious affiliation with any specific denomination. This influence also has had its effect upon the literature, art, and manners of our time.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Church and Politics*

ONE of the most absurd of our popular clichés is that the Church has no concern with politics. The solecism arises out of a misunderstanding of both terms in the proposition. The Church is concerned with the whole of man's life upon earth, not merely with his prayers but with all his human relations. Politics is simply the art of living together: it concerns itself with regulating men's conduct so that they may live in community harmoniously and to the best advantage of all. It should be obvious therefore that the Church's concerns must overlap politics at many points. For the Church to resign all interest in political affairs would be to abdicate a large part of its rights and duties. What the phrase quoted above is really intended to convey is that the Church should not identify itself with any one political party. But that of course is a quite different thing, and the difference should be kept clear.

No reader of the Bible has any excuse for failing to recognize the influence exercised by the Church in the political sphere. The Old Testament is full of it. The prophets were not only inspired preachers, they were also great political speakers. Those whose writings find a place in the scriptures generally took an unpopular line in politics, but with immense courage, in face of continual danger, they never failed to declare what they believed to be God's will in both the domestic and the international spheres. This duty was all the more incumbent upon them because secular and ecclesiastical interests were not kept in separate compartments: the nation was God's people and Church and State were merely two sides of the same shield.

In the New Testament we find a very different situation. Christianity presented itself as a reform movement within Judaism and it had at first no direct relation with the State. Further, the politics of the day were in a very disturbed condition. Galilee and Judaea were under the occupation of the Roman power and

the frequent outbreaks of turbulence were severely punished. Jesus's own attitude was that of a mediator. He invited both resistance members and collaborators to join his chosen band of apostles, and in his saying 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' he seems to have urged the current duty of acceptance of the political situation.

With St Paul we find the situation much the same. He urges obedience to the civil government, 'The powers that be are ordained of God.' He calls for prayers even for a Nero. He is quite prepared to appeal to Roman authority against the designs of his own Jewish countrymen. In the contemporary situation he sees a greater part for the Church in international than in national affairs. His whole philosophy of history interprets events as leading up to the unity of the nations. The great barrier at the moment was that between the Jews and all other nations. But Christ had come to break down 'the middle wall of partition': in him all men were made one. This was the consummation to which everything had been leading: it was the great moment of all history. Henceforth there was neither Greek nor Jew, bound nor free. There was no *apartheid* for St Paul.

It is true that a change came with the persecution under Nero and the subsequent emperors. The Apocalypse shows something very like hatred for those 'red with the blood of the saints'. In the meantime Christianity had been carefully distinguished from Judaism, and the Christian Church stood out as a tiny enclave against a hostile environment, having neither racial nor national affiliation. It was accused of 'enmity against the human race'; if it was not true that its hand was against every man, it was at least true that every man's hand was against it. Nevertheless Christian writers still affirmed the duty of prayers on behalf of the government and its officers, and the Church's apologists tried to persuade the emperors and the general public that Christians were the most loyal of all members of the empire. This remains true, although recent historians have placed a new emphasis on the opposition 'Christ versus Caesar'. It is believed that Christians early recognized an irreconcilable antagonism between the rival claimants to the titles 'Lord' and 'Saviour', between the imperial ruler and the carpenter's son, and that the



Church hammered out its own identity on the anvil of that opposition.

We have already referred to the change that took place in the fourth century when Constantine became the first Christian emperor. The Church progressed from toleration and a favoured position under Constantine in 312 to complete establishment as the recognized religion of the Empire under Theodosius in 381. It was now in a position, as it had never been before, to exercise its influence in politics. If legislation already begins to show the remedial effect of Christianity under Constantine, we have a definitely Christian code under Justinian in the sixth century. This emanated from Constantinople, where all the way from the fourth to the fifteenth century there was maintained a close alliance between Church and State. This alliance has traditionally been described as Caesaro-papism, with the implied suggestion that the Emperor was effective head not only of Church but of State. But Sir Ernest Barker has recently told us that this is an unfair description and title for a system in which Emperor and Patriarch made a fair division of the duties of government both civil and ecclesiastical.<sup>1</sup> If the Emperor played a leading part in Church affairs, he was himself very much under the influence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, even in secular affairs.

That is the system that prevailed in the east. In the meantime the west had seen a different development. Bishops after the establishment soon began to assume importance in public affairs. It was not merely that their councils occupied public attention throughout the Empire, but as individuals they were often called upon to fulfil civic functions. They acted as judges in the law-courts, and became the recognized defenders of the poor against the petty tyranny of the bureaucracy. As the machinery of imperial organization began to crumble under barbarian onslaughts, they became more and more responsible for the actual conduct of public business. Nowhere was this process more marked than in Rome itself, where the bishop on more than one occasion proved the only personal authority that could either prevent or mitigate the violence of barbarian assault. Small wonder that the

1. Cf. also Every, *The Byzantine Patriarchate*, p. 32.

Pope, in place of the absentee Emperor, became the obvious representative of law and order. The names of Leo I and Gregory I are conspicuous in this regard.

In the fifth century Augustine provided a theoretical justification for this empirical state of affairs. In his *City of God* he started a train of thought that was to have a marked effect on the constitution of Europe for a thousand years. Human life was the scene for the interplay of two great forces, the City of God and the City of the World, the former eternal, the latter temporal. On earth the former was represented by the Church, the latter by the Empire of Rome. In this world the City of God was a pilgrim: its true home and destination was in heaven: nevertheless in the present sphere of time and space it contained some elements that were contrary to its true nature and tended to retard its proper development. By contrast the City of the World was bound to this earth, its standards and its ambitions: nevertheless it contained elements that, properly used, could lead it near to the Kingdom of Heaven. What for instance would even an earthly state be without justice but a band of robbers? Consequently the pilgrim City of God must not wholly reject the City of the World, but must use for its own purposes whatever it might find of value in civic ordinances to assist its aim of leading all to perfection under the acknowledged rule of God.

The Middle Ages interpreted this prophetic insight as justifying the imposition of unity upon the whole of human society under the leadership of the Church. There was indeed an acknowledged place for civic organization. To put it symbolically, there were two swords, one in the hand of the Pope, the other in the hand of the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>1</sup> But the former was the more important. The Emperor exercised a merely derivative authority: his business was to support and protect the Pope. Perhaps the most dramatic exhibition of this relationship was seen when it was left to Pope Alexander VI to divide between two secular kingdoms, Spain and Portugal, the lands discovered in the New World beyond the seas. But this was in 1493, towards the end of the period, and already there had been signs that the

1. This was the strange interpretation sometimes put upon Luke 22:38.



imposing façade of unity would soon be broken. The relationship between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire had never been easy, and there had indeed been occasions when the Emperor had beaten the Pope in the game of power-politics. Moreover, within the feudal and ecclesiastical system there had also been a vast number of corporations which had struggled continually for varying degrees of independence against each other and against their superiors. Close inspection shows that the boasted unity became little more than a name. The experiment built upon Augustine's theory had been a magnificent effort, but it had failed.

The cause of the failure was the same as that which has brought disruption to so large a portion of the world in our own generation – the rise of nationalism. The kingdoms of Europe asserted themselves against the over-lordship of the Empire and secured a greater measure of independence. This secular aim coincided with the religious upheaval of the Reformation, and the two forces together were too strong for the traditional forms of government both ecclesiastical and secular. The disruption did not imply at the outset any failure in religion. The alliance between nationalism and the new forms of Christian expression was at least genuine enough to produce the theory that each ruler had the right to determine the religion of his own people. *Cujus regio ejus religio*.<sup>1</sup> For a time the church in each country continued to exercise much the same influence in secular politics as it had done under the old order, but gradually the civic power displaced the ecclesiastical: laymen instead of clerics occupied the chief offices of government. At length we have the emergence of the secular state which conducts its affairs independently of any admitted religious influence.

In many countries the Church lost its favoured position and was looked upon as an enemy of the régime. Marxist communism is avowedly opposed to all religion, and consequently subjected the Church in Russia to many disabilities in the period between the two World Wars. During the second, when every possible means of support was needed in the national struggle,

1. The doctrine that the ruler of a country had the right to dictate its religion.

persecution died down. The right of worship has since been conceded but that of propaganda is severely curtailed. In China much the same position prevails, with the added factor that neither missionaries nor financial assistance can be received by the churches from abroad. In Germany on the other hand both the Roman Catholic and the Confessional churches have gained fresh prestige from the gallant resistance they put up against Hitler's incursions upon religious freedom.

In Italy the Concordat of 1929 arranged amicable terms between Mussolini and the Papacy, so that the Pope remained temporal head of a tiny territory. What is more important is that his church in that country still retains a major interest in popular education. But nominally at least he has no more influence in Italian politics than in those of any other foreign state. In Latin America the influence of the Church has been radically curtailed since the time when the outburst of nationalism secured the various countries their independence. Some attempt was made to nationalize the Church itself. In Brazil, Argentina, and Peru the Roman Catholic episcopate had to be native born, but many of the inferior clergy were foreign. In Mexico the constitution of 1917 deprived the Church of many of its remaining privileges, even disenfranchizing the clergy. The Church resisted and the State retaliated with further reprisals, until in 1935 fourteen states had made the giving of the sacraments a criminal offence. Since then the political position has remained difficult, although the Church's power to perform its spiritual functions has been largely restored.

Almost everywhere political secularization was accompanied at length by a general decrease in religious observance. Theological matters ceased to be, if they had ever genuinely been, the main interest of the people. This does not mean that religion died out: far from it. But it became the interest, not of the whole, but of a section of the people. The Church, instead of being a recognized ruling authority, became what its Founder said it was, a little yeast in a large lump of dough. In some countries it barely maintained the right to exist; in others it had to adapt its methods to new conditions. But wherever possible it has continued openly to pursue the same ends, and has not ceased to



declare what it believes to be the will of God even in the political sphere. Indeed, we may recognize a gain in the new situation. What it could once do by authority, it now seeks to do by persuasion.

The way in which the persuasion works differs in different countries. In Russia little can be done except by prayer and private witness. In France, Germany, and Italy a political party has been formed to represent specifically Christian interests on the legislative bodies. In England no such 'Christian' party is necessary because the country still has an established Church and because there are noteworthy Christian representatives in all the main political parties. We may add that in Britain there is still so much diffused Christianity that extremely few members of parliament would be likely to offer open defiance to Christian principles. In any case so long as a proportion of the Bishops still retain seats in the House of Lords there will always be an opportunity for what may be called official Christianity to make its voice heard in the legislature. It may be true that the bishops do not often speak except upon social, moral, and educational topics and on legislation directly affecting the Church of England, but it is precisely on such topics that we should wish the choice of religious leaders to be heard. The objections sometimes raised against the 'interference' of the Church in politics do not often envisage such matters as these. Now that the Church can no longer be accused of exercising a controlling influence in political affairs the majority of citizens are probably glad that her voice should be heard and her witness made.

PART TWO

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The Constitution of the Church



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Growth of Organization*

As will have been gathered from our way of tackling our theme, the aim of this book is to be not argumentative but descriptive. We have no case to develop, unless it be the general one that the Church is worthy of notice, but that indeed is a presupposition without which the book would hardly have been worth writing. What we wish to do is to see the Church as it exists today and to understand the functions it performs in the world. That is why we deliberately began on the circumference and tried to show what the Church has done and is doing where it makes contact with the society that forms its environment in this world. So many practically-minded people suspect religious ideas of being mainly in the air, and religious organizations of looking upon themselves and being concerned only with their own affairs, that it seemed advisable at the outset to present the Church as it really is, namely as an organization that is desperately concerned with the total welfare of ordinary men and women, both in their public and private life but primarily with their eternal salvation. We must now confine our thoughts within a somewhat narrower circle, and consider the Church as it is in itself. We shall not yet try to penetrate to the heart and centre of its life but examine the Church as an ecclesiastical organization with its own constitution and administrative arrangements. In other words, we wish to deal in this section with the body rather than with the soul of the Church.

Here we meet in concentrated force a difficulty we have already mentioned. The 'Church', as the term is loosely used today, does not present itself as a single entity but as a variety of forms that differ very markedly among themselves. At this stage of our task it is best to continue using the term in its widest connotation to include what the Anglican Bidding Prayer describes as 'the whole congregation of Christ's flock scattered throughout the world'. Later we shall have to limit our

consideration to one type of organization at a time in order to get a more detailed picture, but for the moment we can range widely over the whole Christian field. Most of us by temperament and training are inclined to regard this as an evil necessity. We would much rather see the Church as one clearly defined organization essentially unchanged from its first foundation right down to the present day. It is perhaps worth remarking that one at least of the modern historians takes a different view. Professor Latour-ette, in his seven-volume *History of the Expansion of the Christian Church*, regards it as an extraordinary example of the vitality of the Christian faith and life that it is able to adapt itself in so many different forms to meet what are presumably different needs arising through the ages in different crises and in different climes. Whether we accept this view or not, the easiest way of pursuing our task will probably be to make a rapid historical sketch of the development of the Christian community from the beginning to the present day, and so to see how the term 'Church' attained its current ambiguity.

It is now very generally agreed by scholars, at least in this country, that from the outset there was intended to be one, and only one, visible society of Christian people. Christianity was born in a Jewish environment: Judaism was the cradle in which it was first nurtured: its first converts were either Jews or proselytes, hangers-on of the synagogue. According to St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus spoke at least twice of his Church,<sup>1</sup> apparently distinguishing it from the surrounding church of Old Testament Judaism. It was the nucleus of, or the introduction to, his Messianic Kingdom. He regarded the new age of the Kingdom of God as beginning in himself, and attached to himself all who were willing to accept him as Messiah in that light. He chose out twelve who should be his apostles or plenipotentiary missionaries. He gave them special training and seems to have named St Peter as their leader. That at least is the tradition as it was accepted by the writers of the New Testament, and it is the only official account we have of the foundation of the Church.

When Jesus had withdrawn from this earthly scene, the survivors among the Apostles took care to maintain and develop

1. Matt. 16:18, and 18:17.



this primordial organization. They filled up the vacancy in their number; appointed additional ministers to perform duties that were becoming too burdensome for themselves; and established a manner of common life – ‘the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers’.<sup>1</sup> That became known as ‘The Way’, the followers of which soon earned the specific name of Christians. No doubt it was originally hoped that the Jewish nation as a whole would accept this way of thought and life and that the Christian Church would thus obviously be continuous with the Jewish. This however was not to be: the Jews as a whole rejected the claim that Jesus was the Messiah and the Christians regarded themselves as the Remnant, the faithful nucleus of God’s people, the sole heirs of the Covenant and of the promises made through the prophets. Henceforth they must be separately organized.

There were, however, two ways in which this might be done. Either they could be developed as an inner circle within Judaism, so that Christians would in effect be Jews who kept the Law but accepted Jesus as Messiah. Or they could cut adrift from Judaism altogether, deny all obligation to keep the Law, and develop their own society as a separate Christian Church with its own initiation, life, and ministry. It was under the impulse of St Stephen and the guiding genius of St Paul that the latter course was followed. That is the real point of the discussion about circumcision that occupies so large a place in St Paul’s letters. It does not mean of course that all influence of Judaism was carefully eliminated. The Christians felt that, like their Master, they had not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil. They took over the Old Testament scriptures; they continued many elements of the synagogue worship. What is more important from our present point of view, they seem to have modelled their organization, and particularly their ministry, on that of Judaism.

The ‘council’, to which the problem of unity with or separation from Judaism was referred as recounted in Acts 15, seems to have taken the place of the Jewish Sanhedrin. It was responsible for the over-all administration. The Apostles were its plenipotentiaries. The ‘deacons’ they appointed seem to correspond

1. Acts 2:42.

to the 'young men' of the Jewish synagogues: the elders they appointed 'in every place' came obviously from the synagogue. By this varied ministry the needs of the growing body of believers were met and the rapidly expanding society was held together.

Owing to the astonishing advance of the Church in the towns of Palestine and round the northern shores of the Mediterranean it was inevitable that there should be some vagaries of worship, organization, and even faith. With all our increased rapidity of communication today we know how difficult it is to keep all the members of even the most authoritarian organizations in step with one another. The Apostles, although they fought hard for legitimate freedom, had no intention of letting freedom degenerate into licence, or of allowing any betrayal of Jesus's original teaching and intention. They were not slow, when occasion demanded it, to exercise their own authority. In fact, authority and unity were two of the most conspicuous notes in the organization of the earliest Christian Church as revealed in the New Testament.

In pursuance of their duty of spreading the Gospel, the ministry of the apostles and of the 'apostolic men', whom they appointed to assist them, was at first an itinerant one. Permanent headquarters however were recognized at Jerusalem under the superintendence of James, a relative of Jesus. By the time Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 this example of a settled ministry of the leaders had begun to be followed elsewhere. John was apparently the head of the church at Ephesus. Our acquaintance with Paul's journeys should not blind us to the amount of time he spent at certain fixed centres such as Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and possibly Rome. St Peter is traditionally believed to have taken charge of affairs at Rome, although the evidence is not so plentiful as we should have wished. Even where no apostle settled, the Christian Church seems to have followed the example of the synagogue in the larger towns, of appointing a president among the elders. Within a century of the crucifixion of its Founder the Church had a regular ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons with a bishop organizing affairs in each of the main cities. The letters of Ignatius of Antioch, written as he



travelled on his way to martyrdom in Rome about A.D. 115, are full of exhortations to the faithful of each city to rally round their bishop. The bishop was expected to be not only the source of administration and the leader of worship but the centre of unity against the disruptive effects of persecution.

Normally the bishop's authority extended over the city and any small communities of Christians that might be formed in the immediate vicinity. Gradually, as numbers increased and more territory was covered, organization was developed along the lines of Roman imperial administration. The boundaries of dioceses were carefully delineated and each bishop was expected to restrict himself to his own sphere, though the bishops of the great imperial centres inevitably exercised some influence over those of the smaller adjacent sees. These arrangements, together with the need to guard the purity of the faith against the corrosion of false teaching, necessitated a good deal of conference among the bishops. They fell into the habit of holding local synods among themselves under the presidency of the senior bishop, that is the one who ministered in the great civic centre of the area. This habit was of great importance. It not only assisted in the development of what we should now call diocesan, provincial, and even patriarchal administration, but it paved the way for a world-wide organization of the Church.

When Constantine became Emperor and resolved to use the Christian Church as an instrument to unify his vast possessions, it was vitally necessary for his purpose that the Church itself should be united. Discovering to his dismay certain disruptive tendencies already at work, he determined to use the synodical method in an attempt to settle disagreements. But he was determined to do on a universal scale what the Church itself had only been able to do on a partial and local basis. After some tentative efforts his determination issued in the summoning of the first world-wide or Ecumenical Council at Nicea in A.D. 325. The method was pursued by subsequent emperors and there ensued the great period of the Councils, in which the whole civilized world was concerned in the endeavour to assist the Church in the definition of its faith, the organization of its administration, and the preservation of its unity.

The effort was only partially successful. There never has been a period when all Christians saw eye to eye with each other. In matters of such fundamental importance as those with which Christianity deals, the nature of God and man, time and eternity, good and evil, purpose and existence, it was perhaps inevitable that there should be wide differences of opinion. The revelation given by Christ did not settle every question in advance but rather gave a clue, a necessary and sufficient clue, by which the steps of mankind should be guided into all truth. Freedom in the use of the clue was recognized, but the Church retained the right to exercise discipline over its members when freedom degenerated into licence and there was danger of the clue being destroyed or lost. Hence the need for the definition of the Church's faith. Hence also the right of excommunication, the right to exclude from its membership those who proved recalcitrant and endangered their own souls and the souls of others by losing, defacing, or destroying the clue.

Thus we find that by the time of Constantine the Church was a fully organized society. It had its strict rules of membership, the breach of which could be punished with dread penalties. At the head of the organization were the five Patriarchs, three of whom, those of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch were recognized by the Council of Nicea in 325. The fourth, the Bishop of Constantinople, as representing the New Rome, was given honorary precedence after Old Rome in 381. And the last of them, the Bishop of Jerusalem, was given the title of Patriarch by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, at the same time that the Patriarch of Constantinople, in spite of protests from Rome, was given actual jurisdiction over Thrace, Asia, and Pontus. These Patriarchs had the right of consecrating the metropolitans, or bishops of the principal sees, in their area, as the metropolitans in their turn had the right of consecrating the diocesans under them. Together with the right to consecrate went certain judicial powers, but apart from that limitation diocesan bishops had full rights within their own territory. In fact the diocese was the effective unit of the world-wide organization. During the first six centuries it was the recurring councils which did more than anything to keep the whole Church together. Later their influence



was exercised in the West by the Pope, to whom there was no rival patriarch. In the East the Patriarch of Constantinople had rivals in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria until the Levant was largely over-run by Islam. Church organization then settled down to the division between East and West, Rome and Constantinople, which characterized the Middle Ages.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Growth of Diversity*

IN the New Testament period disunion did not involve more than an occasional proceeding against an individual 'false teacher'. Later, in proportion with the expansion of the Church, such individuals were able to gather round them larger bands of followers. The bishops had not only to act against them in synod but also to define more exactly the rule of faith. This rule was the summary of Christian doctrine which they taught to their candidates for baptism and which was gradually condensed still further into the creeds. During the period of the councils the differences began to assume national proportions. They came to a head after the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. As was to occur so often later, theological differences were combined with political disaffection. Persians, Armenians, Egyptians, growing restive under the iron hand of imperial despotism or under diplomatic pressure, rebelled not only against central authority but also against the precise definition of the faith for which Constantinople stood. Hence we begin to get on the boundaries of the Empire national Churches which represent the first important break in the constitutional unity of the Church. It was this disruption that made easy the path of the Islamic Invasion when it came in the seventh century.

Nevertheless the first four General or Ecumenical Councils<sup>1</sup> did effect something of permanent value. They made the faith of the Church much more coherent and they perfected its organization. If some fragments broke away, the vast body of the Great Church still remained intact. Because of the difficulties through which it had passed, three centuries of spasmodic persecution and then a century and a half of intense intellectual conflict, it had been welded into a solid whole with an easily distinguishable life and mentality of its own. During the succeeding centuries the eastern half, centring in Constantinople,

1. Nicea 325, Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451.



suffered little change and maintained its inheritance of the old classical culture as it had been translated into Christian terms and infused with Christian vitality. In the West, with Rome as its centre, when the Empire fell, the Church proved the one element of ancient life that was able to withstand and survive the upheaval of the barbarian invasions. Although one section of those barbarians had been converted to a variant type of Christian faith in the shape of Arianism the new nations as a whole recognized the majesty of the Church. It appealed to them as a divine society bringing eternal sanctions within the sphere of time. It also carried the prestige of the ancient law, order, and majesty of Rome. They submitted to its influence, allowing their life and manners to be gradually moulded to some conformity with its standards.

The difference in their history and environment led to a difference in constitution and ultimately to a complete break between the Church of the east and that of the west. In the east, as we have seen, the Patriarch of Constantinople shared with his Emperor the honours of government in both Church and State, the latter taking the lead in civil and the former in ecclesiastical affairs. It was a relation very difficult for the western mind to grasp. It meant that Church and State were not regarded as two separate powers but went forward as an impressive unity. That unity embraced the culture of the ancient classical world as well as the religious sanctions of the older half of Christendom. In all their relations with the new nations forming from the north the men of Constantinople were thus backed by everything of value in current civilization. Even in the older towns the civic life centred more and more in the Cathedral as the ancient *curia* decayed. To the Slavs Constantinople was the centre of the world: there was no other city so rich or so cultured: in art as in religion they owed everything to her.<sup>1</sup> Russia was equally indebted to this conjunction of church and state. Of 240 Russian writers in the medieval period, only thirty were laymen; all the rest were monks or clerics. It was taken for granted that there, as elsewhere in the eastern tradition, Church and State should be closely integrated.<sup>2</sup>

1. Baynes and Moss, *Byzantium*, p. 367. 2. *op. cit.*, pp. 374-5.

In the west, by way of contrast, as early as 494 Pope Gelasius had enunciated the theory of two distinct and independent spheres of civic and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> In fact, however, the western system is more often described as a unitary system in which the State had a merely derivative power, not an equal power as in the east. As the moon derives its light from the sun, so even the Holy Roman Emperor derived his authority from the Pope. Needless to say, this claim was strongly contested all the way down the Middle Ages, but it was not until the Reformation that nationalism asserted itself sufficiently to make the kings and rulers feel themselves independent of the Papacy. The desire to dominate did not lead the Popes to merge their authority or their organization in that of the state. Ecclesiastical constitution was developed with tremendous strength apart from the state. Indeed it was often the state that learnt the art of administration from the Church.

The development was assisted by the final split between east and west in 1054. Theological differences were made the excuse for the schism. The west claimed a double procession for the Holy Spirit from the Father *and* the Son whereas the east claimed only a single procession from the Father *through* the Son. But as usual the real differences lay in personal and political rivalries. Once the split had occurred, the west could follow its own line of development without embarrassing associations with another half of Christendom that was differently constituted.

In any case the western church pursued its own way and developed its own particular ethos in both internal and external relations. Internally its organization was made dependent upon the Bishop of Rome, who in spite of periods of subjection to a foreign power (the Babylonish Captivity at Avignon)<sup>2</sup> and of rivals in the Papacy itself (at one period there were three popes simultaneously),<sup>3</sup> nevertheless claimed to be supreme not only over local and national churches but even over councils of the universal Church. Externally the Papacy exerted its authority in secular affairs with varying fortune. The three occasions of

1. Every, *Byzantine Patriarchate*, p. 52.

2. Clement V took up residence at Avignon in 1309.

3. The Great Schism in the papacy began in 1378 and ended 1417.



marked success which specially caught the imagination of Europe were the submission of Henry IV to the authority of Gregory VII when he stood barefoot in the snow at Canossa (1077); the act of King John of England in making his crown a fief of the Pope (1212), and the division of the newly discovered lands beyond the Atlantic between Spain and Portugal by Pope Alexander VI.

This impressive combination of unity and authority was little more than a façade. Behind it society was broken up into countless corporations, each with its own rights and jurisdiction, which it was ever seeking to extend. Within the Empire, which never included England, there were the nationalities; within the nation were the cities; within the city were the guilds. The Church itself was not exempt from this fragmentation of authority. The provinces were not markedly submissive to the Papal *curia*: the dioceses were largely independent of the province: the monasteries were outside diocesan authority: the cathedrals included not one but a number of corporations possessing well-defined rights against each other. The wonder is that the system held together so long. It was brought to an end in the sixteenth century by the spread of education, the intellectual vitality of the Renaissance, the development of nationalism, the emergence of a new religious spirit, and the arrival on the European stage of certain men of genius who had the gift of making their potentially explosive ideas effective.

The result of the Reformation was to drive the inherent fragmentation of medieval life to the surface and to shatter completely its appearance of unity. The cataclysm was not at all like the split that had broken the Church in the eleventh century. Then both sides had retained roughly the same theology and the same polity. The resultant fracture was a simple one. On this occasion however, while one element maintained its identity in allegiance to Rome, the other that broke away was shattered into many pieces.

The reason for this fragmentation was that the people affected by the new thought could find little or no relation between the religion of the Church and that which they now believed themselves to have discovered in the Bible. They therefore had little

interest in the historical Church and were not concerned to preserve its external continuity. Although some of the leaders were not ill-read in the early Fathers, they all in effect wished to make a fresh start from the Bible alone. This might not have been so bad if they had been able to agree about the ecclesiastical polity and the theological doctrine of the Bible. But in point of fact there was no such agreement. Having abandoned the one received tradition, they had no guide to the correct interpretation of the scriptures but the individual intellect. The result was that in the paucity of scientific knowledge there arose a number of different interpretations of primitive Christianity; and a number of different ecclesiastical organizations were instituted to embody them, resulting in a multiplicity of sects. After the dust of conflict had settled down, the religious alignment of Europe had assumed very much the same appearance as it still bears today. Roman Catholicism regained a little lost ground and consolidated the Papal position at the Council of Trent. So far from showing any desire to return to a primitive Christianity it has since pressed its definitions further in the direction distasteful to the Reformers. Facing this strongly integrated body there has been a considerable mass of Protestants divided between a number of national and denominational churches. They have had no cohesion among themselves and have even on occasion shown some antagonism to one another. Today, however, they genuinely strive to give expression to a common spirit. They are at long last struggling to mend the breaches made in the sixteenth century and are forming an association comparable in strength to that of Rome.

The European situation is fairly faithfully reflected in other countries of the west, such as the U.S.A. World figures are not easy to estimate with any confidence. Out of a roughly calculated three thousand million inhabitants of this planet a third are Christian. Roman Catholics claim that they have 423 million adherents, while the number of non-Roman Christians must amount to about the same. Of the latter the Orthodox (i.e. the ancient churches of the east) are said to number 150 millions, with another 10 millions for the separated churches of the east. Lutherans account for 68 millions, Reformed (Presbyterian) for



41, Anglicans and Baptists for 40 millions each, Methodists 30 millions, and Congregationalists 5 millions. These of course represent only the major sections into which Christendom is divided. There are, as we have already seen, a whole army of smaller sects which together bring up the numbers very considerably. They differ from each other in a multitude of details both of doctrine and of constitution, but inasmuch as practically all acknowledge the same fundamental creed, the aphorism may be accepted that 'the things in which they agree are more important than those in which they differ'. The picture finally presented is thus one of underlying harmony combined with a confusing multitude of splits, separations, and schisms.

Recently an effort of great importance has been made to bring some order into this confusion. No account of the organization of the Church would now be complete which did not take some notice of the Ecumenical Movement. But our account of that development we must reserve for a later page.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *The Anglican Situation*

THE Church of England and the other Churches that stem from it, while they cannot be understood apart from the general background we have so far sketched, show marked idiosyncrasies of their own. To begin with, although the Anglican Communion as we know it is clearly a part of western Christendom, it has not developed without certain eastern influences. These were more clearly felt in its origins than later. We are generally accustomed to speak of Pope Gregory the Great as 'our father who gave us baptism'. But it should never be forgotten that at the time when his emissary, Augustine, landed in Kent (597) to evangelize the south-eastern portion of this country, another mission began similar work in the north. This latter mission was conducted by Celtic monks from Iona, and it is generally agreed that there was a strong eastern strain in the Celtic or Irish Church.

It is not always realized how strong and effective the Celtic mission was, but in fact it was responsible for just about half of the conversion of England. The reason for our comparative neglect of it is that when the confusion arising out of the conflicting customs of the two missions became too awkward to be endured and choice had to be made between them, the north decided at the Synod of Whitby in 664 to follow the Roman customs. The church in this country thus identified itself with the church of the west and entered definitively within the Roman obedience, although that of course was not itself so oppressive or so effective as it became later. Even so, England was not without some further influence from the east. In 668 Theodore, a monk of Tarsus, the home town of St Paul, was sent out by the reigning Pope to be Archbishop of Canterbury. He found only three bishops alive in England but he reorganized the dioceses and gave them leaders. He also carried forward a great development of the parochial system, by which ultimately the whole country was to be divided



into workable sections with a 'parson'<sup>1</sup> in charge of each. At the same time Theodore drew up a code of rules and penances by which the moral conduct of the people might be improved; and these rules he drew from both Greek and Latin sources. Further, he taught the Church to feel its own identity by calling together the first national Synod or gathering of the clergy at Hertford. That Synod transcended all tribal boundaries and so paved the way for secular unity.

Normally it was the custom during the Saxon period for the affairs of both State and Church to be dealt with by the Witan, in which the bishops and abbots sat with the secular nobility. This was much more in accord with eastern than with western practice. It was the conquest by William I that brought a clear separation between the judicial and legislative bodies of the Church on the one side and of the State on the other.

A reform was going on at that time in the Roman Church, by which the Pope was seeking to disentangle ecclesiastical from civil administration, and so to raise the standard of religious discipline. William had won the support of the Pope for his expedition by pledging himself to further the cause of this reform. That promise he loyally proceeded to fulfil when he had won his crown. He had also undertaken to secure the payment of the arrears of Peter's Pence, and that too he did. But one thing he flatly refused to do, and that was to do homage to the Pope for his kingdom. The letter in which he frankly stated his position to the bishop in Rome still makes entertaining reading.

To Gregory, the most noble Shepherd of the Holy Church, William, by the grace of God renowned king of the English, and duke of the Normans, greeting with amity. Hubert, your legate, Holy Father, coming to me in your behalf, bade me do fealty to you and your successors, and think better in the matter of the money which my predecessors were wont to send to the Roman Church: the one point I agreed to, the other I did not agree to. I refused to do fealty, nor will I, because neither have I promised it, nor do I find that my predecessors did it to your predecessors. The money for nearly three years, whilst I was in Gaul, has been

1. Parson, *persona*, the 'person' or official representative of God and the Church in his own area.

carelessly collected ; but now that I am come back to my kingdom, by God's mercy, what has been collected is sent by the aforesaid legate, and what remains shall be dispatched, when opportunity serves, by the legate of Lanfranc our faithful archbishop. Pray for us, and for the good estate of our realm, for we have loved your predecessors and desire to love you sincerely, and to hear you obediently before all.

Similar independence of spirit was displayed repeatedly by English Kings throughout the Middle Ages, although John, on a famous occasion, showed himself a noteworthy exception. This readiness to assert its freedom of action has sometimes been taken to show that the church in this country was never so much a part of the western ecclesiastical organization as were the churches of the continent. That however would be pressing the case too far. It is true that some features of continental catholicism were not to be found here. England was never part of the Holy Roman Empire, nor did the Inquisition ever find a lodgement here. But the papacy received regular tribute from this country ; the Pope exercised much influence in appointments and aroused much opposition by the practice of 'provision'<sup>1</sup>; and the canon law was just as much recognized here as on the continent.

The result was that England achieved a very elaborate and firmly constructed ecclesiastical constitution. Not only did bishops and abbots sit in Parliament but the two provinces of Canterbury and York each had their own upper and lower Houses of Convocation. Ecclesiastical courts dealt not only with clergy discipline, but with marriage and probate and other moral and spiritual cases affecting the laity. The latter often found the system unduly oppressive. There were many incipient rebellions, but the system was so much a part of everyday life and thought that even a leader like Wycliffe could not inspire sufficient dissatisfaction with the existing régime to make any determined effort to bring it to an end. It required the combination of a whole continental movement and a dynastic necessity at home to bring that revolt about.

1. Nomination to vacant benefices over the head of the proper patron. The Statutes of Provisors were passed in the fourteenth century to check the practice.



When the occasion did arise, it was almost ridiculously easy. Henry VIII had allowed, and even encouraged, his chief minister Wolsey, Archbishop of York, to gather into his own hands all the reins of government, ecclesiastical as well as civil. As *legatus a latere* he took precedence even of the Archbishop of Canterbury. As Chancellor he was the first minister of state. Never before had one man been so completely master in Church and State. When Henry wanted an heir and needed an annulment of his current marriage, all he had to do was to get rid of Wolsey and take over the executive functions himself. He was thus able to ignore the tergiversations and delays of the Roman courts and to arrange for a more speedy and favourable verdict in England.

To give formal sanction to these practical steps Henry declared himself, and not the Pope, sole Head on earth of the Church of England. He had no intention of altering its doctrine, as he showed by cruelly punishing those of his subjects who presumed independently to make that attempt. Nor did he wish to alter its constitution; and the lawyers saw to it that the old laws should be adapted to suit the change in headship. The most obvious alteration as far as the people were concerned was the dissolution of the monasteries.

This position bequeathed by Henry VIII was substantially reaffirmed, after the interlude of reforming zeal under Edward VI and of reactionary fervour under Mary, by Elizabeth I, who held much the same views on religion as her father. She was not able quite to restore the position as she would have wished, since the spread of the new ways of thinking had pushed Parliament over to the Puritan side. But she did drop the title 'Head of the Church', taking instead that of 'Governor', which the sovereign has retained ever since. As a result of the changes, the Church was more closely associated with the Crown and indeed with the State than before. It was the 'established' church, which meant not that the Church was created (*constituta*) by the State but that its position was supported and guaranteed (*stabilita*) by the law of the land. Where necessary its ecclesiastical enactments would be enforced by the secular arm. The laws of the Church of England, although they may apply only to her own members, are still part of the law of the land.

It was hardly to be expected that the adherents of the old régime would take all this lying down. Actually the country as a whole accepted the changes with remarkable equanimity. Under Henry VIII two specially fine men, Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor after Wolsey, had refused to accept the Supreme Head Act (1554) and lost their lives. Under Elizabeth twelve years were to pass before any Roman Catholic paid the supreme penalty on grounds connected with the changes in religion. The definitely foreign aspect that Roman Catholicism now bore, and its sharp distinction from any other type of Catholicism hitherto known in England, was due to the action of Pope Pius V, who in exasperation at the Queen's success published the Bull *Regnans in Excelsis* (1570) formally excommunicating her and absolving her subjects under pain of excommunication from their oath of allegiance. He thus at one stroke made every Roman Catholic in the country a potential traitor. It was not until 1829 that the Catholic Emancipation Act allowed Roman Catholics to resume full and unfettered rights of citizenship in the state.

If the ecclesiastical constitution of the country was thus weakened in one direction by Papal influence, it was further weakened in the opposite direction by the defection of certain extreme followers of the Reformation. The Puritan effort was not originally intended to disrupt the Church of England but to change its character from within. In particular the Presbyterian followers of Calvin tried to set up a kind of underground constitution, which would make episcopacy unnecessary and replace it by a parity of ministers together with a *classis* in each parish which would take over responsibility for moral discipline. More extreme still were those who disliked any connexion of the Church with the State and made a virtue of separation. Such were the Independents who were later the backbone of Cromwell's army and of whom the closest modern descendants are the Congregationalists. The Anabaptists, who were suspected of adding political anarchism to such theological tenets as are now held by our modern Baptists, had all along made trouble and had suffered for it severely. A less usual type of 'sectary' was to be seen in the Quakers, who, following their leader George Fox in declaim-



ing against the 'steeple-houses' of the establishment, took some centuries to divest themselves of queer physical expressions of religious enthusiasm and base their practice upon the twin pillars of 'inner light' and Christian charity.

Between them these divergent influences broke up the fabric of religious unity in this country. In the circumstances it is remarkable that the national church was able to maintain its essential constitution unchanged and to embrace so large a portion of the nation within it. It would seem that the phlegmatic character of the Englishman was already strongly marked.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Expansion*

IN the meantime a change had begun that was to involve as great an alteration in the appearance and even in the structure of the Church as the Reformation itself. This change was the unforeseen expansion of Christendom overseas. Hitherto the Church had functioned within circumscribed limits. Now the globe itself, and nothing less, was to dictate the boundary.

We must remember that Christianity began as a Palestinian movement and in its early years belonged almost exclusively to the Middle East. Nevertheless, within the first century of its history the Church was already spreading out its tentacles around the northern as well as the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. For the next two centuries it fought a steadily advancing action against paganism until in 381 Theodosius I made it the established religion of the Roman Empire. Henceforth it worked steadily for the elimination of paganism and for the consolidation of its own position as the sole effective religion of the 'civilized' world, which in reality meant the world that had the Mediterranean Sea as its centre.

During the seventh and eighth centuries the invasions of Islam robbed the Church of most of its gains in Asia and North Africa. The path of the invaders had been made easy, as we have seen, by the defection of various national churches in those areas on both political and theological grounds. As those churches were known to be antagonistic to the Byzantine government (i.e. the government centred in Constantinople, the New Rome), it was perhaps natural that they should be allowed by the Islamic conqueror to continue their own independent existence. Apart from these separated churches beyond the diminished borders of the Empire, the Church was now in effect confined within the limits of Europe. Thus Christianity, which had begun as an eastern, not to say Palestinian, religion, had now become a mainly European affair. This situation continued through the Middle Ages.



That was the position at the time of the Reformation. By the sixteenth century, however, Europe had discovered fresh scope for its activities in the opening up of new lands beyond the seas. First along the coasts of Africa, then in India, and then in America, Europeans began to trade and conquer, and finally to build replicas of their fatherland and its institutions. From the first the Church had its own emissaries with the pioneers, and as the settlements became permanent it proceeded to establish itself for the benefit of native and European alike. And so from being first a Palestinian movement, and then in the Middle Ages a mainly European affair, the Church in the Modern Age again changed its character to become a world-wide institution.

But of course there was a difference. The historic Church was no longer the sole effective representative of Christianity. There were indeed a number of claimants to the title 'Church'. The discrepancy was not quite so obvious as it might have been, because over a large part of Europe the principle *cujus regio ejus religio* prevailed, and each mission naturally followed the design of the home church that sent it out. Also it must be confessed that in these comparatively early days the continental Protestants had not much use for missions. Luther and Calvin were eminent Europeans, and with so many Christians to convert at home there seemed no particular urgency to set about converting the heathen. So it was left almost entirely to Rome to inaugurate and carry on the work of evangelization in the new areas. This was also the easier plan because most of the countries that began to plant colonies were themselves Roman Catholic. Spain, Portugal, France were prepared to give even more support to the church overseas than to the church at home. From the point of view of governmental action it probably was more important.

England as usual made an exception to this tidy scheme of things. Some of her overseas adventures were dictated or influenced by religious scruple, and it was inevitable that those who left her shores for theological reasons should want to build their new homes where they could practise their faith according to their conscience. America affords the most conspicuous example of this kind of expansion. The Roman Catholic Church established itself in South America through missions from Spain

and Portugal. North America was largely apportioned between various English religious settlements. In Massachusetts the Independents were established. Maryland began as a Roman Catholic colony. In Virginia and the Carolinas the Church of England was established; while Pennsylvania was founded by the Quaker William Penn, but on the principle of religious liberty. Disestablishment of the Church of England in the American colonies followed naturally upon the War of Independence in 1776. But although President Jefferson in 1785 was responsible for the passing of an Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, in Massachusetts the New England Puritanism retained its privileged position till as late as 1834. The result was that the United States became both a focus and a reflexion of the forces of divided Christendom.

The Christian expansion in America, as well as in Africa and the East, was forwarded and developed by the help of a new kind of organization, the missionary society. Originally, of course, the whole Church had felt itself responsible for its own spread. In the Middle Ages, however, interest in missions had died down, and the leaders of the Reformation, so far from trying to revive it, tried to rationalize their lack of zeal. It was only the Moravians who resumed the old habit of making the Church as a whole its own missionary organization. In other denominations the task was left to the knot of enthusiasts in each case who were willing to band themselves together and perform what seemed to them an essential function on behalf of the whole Church.

Rome was fortunate in having a number of religious orders which were willing to add this task to their other duties. Among them the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits bear a particularly honourable record in this connexion. But even Rome found it necessary to found the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* in 1622, and France started its own *Société des Missions Étrangères* in 1658. The first English society of the kind was the New England Company, founded by the Long Parliament in 1649, the year of Charles I's execution. More important was the founding of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) by Dr Bray in 1698, followed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) in 1701. They represented the traditional



High Church attitude of the Church of England. The evangelical revival that swept the country in the latter part of the eighteenth century was responsible for the institution of many more societies. The Baptists founded theirs in 1792. Undenominational influences, which turned out to be mostly Congregationalist, founded the London Missionary Society in 1795. Four years later in 1799 there came the Church Missionary Society, the greatest of all the English efforts.

From the point of view of administration the interesting thing about these institutions was that they cut across the ordinary organization of their home churches. In churches of the ancient tradition they were outside the customary diocesan and episcopal control. This is true even of the Roman missions. In the Far East the jealousy of French and Jesuit missionaries in Cochin China became something of a scandal until bishops were appointed and order was restored. Among Anglicans the Caroline expedient of putting all the overseas work of the Church of England under the control of the Bishop of London, beneficial as it was in the beginning, endured far too long. The difficulties of providing bishops for America were felt both by the British Government and by the American colonists: they were not overcome until bishops were consecrated for America, first at Aberdeen in 1784 and then at Lambeth three years later. Anglican bishops were not consecrated in America itself till 1792. Elsewhere, as for instance in India, the growing power of the local church, particularly where a diocesan or provincial organization was set up, was not always easy to reconcile with the authority of some society in England that still provided most of the money and the men. The nineteenth century, which was the greatest era of missionary expansion in all history, saw the young missionary churches suffering from many growing pains. In the twentieth century a more comfortable *modus vivendi* has in most cases been reached: the daughter churches have achieved independence, as was proper. In this respect the Church has in more than one instance set a remarkable example for secular authority to follow.

The resultant picture of world-wide ecclesiastical organization is exceedingly complex and quite impossible to trace in detail. Perhaps the Roman Catholic system is the easiest to grasp,

since it still maintains a measure of central control with the Pope, the Papal *curia* and the College of Cardinals reigning over the whole organization from Rome itself as the centre. In the last resort it is there that disputes are settled and thence that directives spring. The Orthodox are in a very different case. They admit no central authority, save that of a General Council, which has not met for centuries and has no immediate prospect of meeting. In the meantime, where their numbers are not great enough to be reckoned as a national church, some bishop is appointed from Moscow or Istanbul to oversee the activities of the local bodies and to keep them in touch with the rest. Anglicanism follows much the same lines. It is a collection of national or provincial churches recognizing no one head on earth, although the Archbishop of Canterbury is acknowledged as the senior bishop. The organization is diocesan throughout. The dioceses are organized into provinces and national churches, but where a diocese is not yet included in any province or national organization it may look to the Archbishop of Canterbury as metropolitan.

The Anglicans are more fortunate than the Orthodox in that they have a central conference which meets normally every ten years and to which they can look for guidance. This Lambeth Conference, as it is called from its place of meeting, is technically a private gathering of bishops from all parts of the Anglican communion at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It first met under the chairmanship of Archbishop Longley in 1867, when it numbered no more than 76 members. At its last meeting in 1958 there were approximately 310, but it still retains its original informal character. It passes no laws or canons, but makes recommendations which are then left to the various synods, national, provincial, or diocesan, to deal with as they think fit.

Churches of the post-Reformation tradition have a less conspicuous international organization. Most of them are organized on national lines but have no regular large-scale meetings to represent a wider area. Nevertheless there are from time to time gatherings of supra-national character, some of which have an importance extending even beyond the limits of their own denomination.



## CHAPTER NINE

### *Types of Constitution*

IN this chapter we propose to consider various methods of ecclesiastical organization as practised by the main bodies of Christians already enumerated. Of course there are many other bodies representing a more diffused type of Christianity and running down to those who claim to have no organization at all, and who indeed affirm that any organization must necessarily impose a restriction upon the free-flowing life of the Spirit. Nevertheless the following are the most important examples of Church constitutions.

First comes that of the Roman Catholic Church. Here we cannot do better than quote Philip Schaff in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*: 'The Roman Church has reared up the grandest governmental fabric known in history. It is an absolute spiritual monarchy, culminating in the Pope, who claims to be the successor of Peter, and the vicar of Christ on earth, and hence the supreme and infallible head of the Church.' Since the recognition in 1929 of a small territory in Italy (Vatican City) as a Papal dominion, the Pope has been universally recognized as a civil as well as an ecclesiastical head of government with all the diplomatic rights that such recognition brings.

The Pope, who is normally an Italian, is chosen by a conclave of cardinals, numbering about seventy, a large proportion of whom also are Italian. Presiding over the conclave the Pope forms the consistory, which is the highest governmental body in the Roman Church. This consistory, together with a number of officials residing at Rome who deal with legal and administrative business, is generally known as the *curia* (*Curia Romana*). It is divided into a number of 'congregations', which are responsible for the oversight of the various departments of administration. The oldest to be formed was the well-known Inquisition, or Holy Office (*Sancta Congregatio Romanae et Universalis Inquisitionis*, 1542), later expanded to watch over religious publications and to keep the Index, or list of prohibited books. Other

important congregations are the *Sacra Congregatio Rituum* (the Sacred Congregation of Rites), founded by Sixtus V in 1588 to attend to liturgical matters; and the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (1622) which is the central body for all missionary concerns.

This of course is the central administration. Under the general jurisdiction of Rome are a number of patriarchates (twelve), which are subdivided into provinces,<sup>1</sup> ruled over by metropolitans, who hold the rank of archbishop. The provinces themselves are subdivided into dioceses, each with a bishop at its head. The system of ecclesiastical regulations under which the whole Church is governed is the canon law (*Codex Juris Canonici*) which has been slowly elaborated from New Testament times to the present day.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is not nearly so centralized. It consists of fifteen autocephalous churches which are united in faith, worship, and principles of government. They too have a system of canon law known as the *Nomocanon*, but it is not so highly developed as the code in use by the Western Church. There is no one head of the Church on earth (except Jesus Christ its founder), but the Bishop of Constantinople is known as the Ecumenical Patriarch and is given a certain priority of honour, much as the Archbishop of Canterbury is in the Anglican Communion. There is the same gradation of administration down from patriarch, through metropolitan, to diocesan bishop. The synodical system is highly developed in the autocephalous churches, and it is at meetings of the synods (variously constituted but normally consisting of the Archbishop with the diocesan bishops) that spiritual questions are settled. In some instances there is also a Mixed Council, consisting of the metropolitan with a number of clergy and laity, at which civil and administrative questions are discussed. As in the West, the monasteries form an enclave within the ecclesiastical organization, but whereas the western monks, whatever their order, look ultimately to the authority and protection of Rome, the eastern are not divided into separate orders. They look back to Basil the Great<sup>2</sup> as their

1. This is normal, but the title 'patriarch' does not always carry jurisdiction.

2. Bishop of Caesarea (370-9).



founder and are spiritually under the direction of their local bishops, although the monastery of Mt Sinai has its own archbishop.

Anglicanism, although it belongs in general ethos to the west, has more affinity in its constitution with the east. It has no central organization of a legislative type. The Lambeth Conference, which approximates most nearly to such a world-wide authority, is, as we have seen, a purely consultative body. There is therefore nothing corresponding to the Roman *curia*. There is however the same gradation of authority as in the Latin and Greek churches from primates of national churches, through metropolitans of provinces, to diocesan bishops. The monastic system, which has developed strongly in some parts, especially in England,<sup>1</sup> is largely independent, but there is a council, with representatives from both the community and diocesan sides, which keeps it in touch with the episcopate; and of course its clerical members derive their orders from the diocesan episcopate. In practically all parts of the Anglican communion a strong synodical system has been developed, including representatives of the laity as well as of the clergy. The bishop's power is therefore strictly limited: he must rule not by his own caprice but according to law, and that law is a living and growing organism.

In England a transitional stage of administration has been reached where there is a somewhat uneasy balance between old and new. The ancient convocations of Canterbury and York, consisting each of an Upper House (of Bishops) and a Lower House (of clergy), still meet under royal mandate as a kind of parallel to Parliament and transact ecclesiastical business. Upon this ancient system has been imposed a modern National Assembly, consisting of two houses of Bishops and Clergy with a third House of Laity. Contrary to the custom of Convocation, in the Assembly the three houses normally meet together. They are entitled to present to Parliament ecclesiastical measures passed by the Assembly. Such measures are inspected by a statutory

1. A critic complains that 'this sounds as if Anglican monasteries were springing up all over the country like mushrooms.' This is precisely what has happened. A casual count reveals more than fifty communities, some of which have a number of separate 'monasteries'.

committee of both houses of Parliament, the Ecclesiastical Committee. If no objection is raised, they lie on the table for a period before becoming law. If objection is raised, they are either withdrawn for amendment or else suffer the fate of other parliamentary bills.

The Assembly is a sufficiently democratic institution. The diocesan bishops compose the house of bishops. The house of clergy is composed of the proctors in convocation, who have been already elected to that office by the whole body of clergy. The lay members have come normally by successive election from the parochial church councils, by way of the ruri-decanal conference and the diocesan conference. The base of the whole pyramid is formed by the electoral roll in each parish, which is composed of baptized members of the Church of England of either sex who are seventeen years old or more and do not belong to some other religious body. It is they who have the right to elect members to the Parochial Church Council, and to the Ruri-decanal Conference. Normally the Parochial Church Council elects members to the Diocesan Conference, while the Diocesan Conference elects representatives to the House of Laity of the Church Assembly.

Lutheranism presents a less coherent picture than any of those we have so far considered. Although there is now a Lutheran World Federation, and although Lutheranism is the oldest and largest of the churches of the Reformation, Luther has proved himself no organizer of the calibre of a Calvin or a Wesley. From the beginning polity has assumed a secondary place in the considerations of his society. Its various national churches differ a good deal in the amount they have retained from their ancient inheritance. Thus, while Sweden rejoices in having maintained the apostolic succession in its episcopate, Norway rejoices in the office of bishop without manifesting any concern over the succession. Denmark dropped both the succession and for a time the very title of bishop. Germany, while attaching a good deal of importance to the office, has linked the Lutheran with the Calvinist in one united 'Evangelical' Church. There are also differences in ritual and worship, some Lutheran churches being furnished in the historic fashion and retaining the vestments and liturgy



of the Mass, while others, more definitely evangelical, favour the bare appearance and extempore prayers of the post-Reformation tradition. From the first, Lutheranism has been ready to recognize the important part that the state should play in national religion. The result is that today in Scandinavia the Lutheran is the established church. In Norway, for instance, the relation of the Church to the State is part of the Constitution, and the Church is administered by a State Department of Church and Education. Even in Germany the church is supported out of the national revenues. The actual management of church affairs is generally carried out by consistories composed of both clergy and laity. In the United States, as was to be expected, it has been found difficult to unite into one solid and cohesive body Lutherans coming from such diverse European backgrounds. Nevertheless, it has been possible to form a Lutheran General Synod, although from time to time there have been secessions from it. At the present time there are in the United States probably five million Lutherans, divided into twenty different denominations.

Presbyterianism, as one would expect from a body that owes so much to the teaching of Calvin, is a more independent and cohesive organization than Lutheranism. Although it is the established church in Holland and in Scotland, it does not submit to state control. It is commonly believed to have no use for bishops, but it would perhaps be more true to say that it believes in the parity of all its ordained ministers and that therefore all ministers are bishops (i.e. overseers or superintendents). On the other hand the elder or presbyter, from whom the body draws its name, remains a lay official, although he is empowered to perform some spiritual functions. The system has its offshoots in Congregationalism and Independency, where the general attitude is much the same except that more emphasis is laid upon the self-determination of the individual congregations.

Owing to its belief in the parity of ministers, Presbyterianism is precluded from the use of patriarchs, metropolitans, and diocesan bishops. It endeavours however to achieve the same administrative ends by appointing 'moderators' who are elected to office for a period, after which they fall back into the position

from which they came. The courts and legislative bodies over which they rule are devised in an ascending scale from the session or consistory of a particular church, through its presbytery or *classis*, and the local synod to the General Synod or Assembly. Unfortunately, in spite of, or perhaps because of, its carefully articulated system of faith and order, Presbyterianism has not been able to maintain its unity: in the United States of America, for instance, it includes ten different denominations. All alike however, since they stem from Calvin, accept the general name and character of 'Reformed', as is seen most conspicuously in the title of the Dutch Reformed Church. Presbyterianism has been described as 'a great church with numberless compacted parts, a great Christian republic, of which the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the sovereign'.

The youngest of these examples of church constitution awaiting our examination is the Methodist. It developed in the bosom of the Church of England in the latter half of the eighteenth century as a protest against the coldness and apathy of the official religion. When John Wesley realized the success of his preaching, he began to enlist the help of lay preachers and organized their followers into societies. The societies were both divided into small 'classes', which met together every week and discussed the spiritual state of the members, and they were also united into 'circuits', each under a superintendent whose main business it was to arrange the rota of preachers. The circuits themselves were subject to the Annual Conference, which began as a meeting of Wesley with his friends but soon became the ultimate authority. This occurred in 1784, the year in which Wesley not only handed over his rights of property in the chapels to the stewards and his right of appointing preachers to the Conference, but also ordained Coke as superintendent, and so created an impossible position between himself and the Church of England. Like Presbyterianism and Lutheranism, Methodism found it impossible to maintain its unity. In the U.S.A., for instance, it includes nineteen different denominations, and the Methodist Episcopal Church even gives to its superintendents the title of bishop. Nevertheless the followers of Wesley throughout the world maintain a family connexion. As long ago as 1881 they



held their first Ecumenical Methodist Conference in London; and since that time Methodism has been busy drawing tighter the bonds of unity between its various branches.

These then are in rough outline the main constitutional systems in which Christianity has organized itself down the ages. When we see how many and various are these forms we can recognize the force of Professor Latourette's dictum that the vitality of the Christian faith is shown in its extraordinary capacity to meet new needs by finding new modes of self-expression. It must be confessed, however, that the resultant diversity has aroused some derision among the opponents of the Church and considerable searching of heart among its followers.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Return to Unity*

IN summarizing the constitutions of some of the principal representatives of the Church, it has been impossible to ignore, even if one wished to do so, the scandal of the disunion of Christendom. The Church's Founder is represented in a well-known passage of the Fourth Gospel as praying that his followers might be one even as he was one with his Father.<sup>1</sup> All the more pitiable therefore is it to see them at the present time divided into so many different, and even opposed, bodies.

It is indeed to be remembered that this disunion is not altogether the fault of the present generation of Christians. It is a condition that they have inherited from their forebears, and it has lasted so long that there have grown up many prejudices and vested interests that have made the differences far more deeply entrenched than they need be. On the other hand it has to be remembered that thought never stands still, and that old battle-grounds rapidly become matters of merely historic interest. Particularly is this true in an age of such rapid transition as our own.

In any case it is quite certain that for many people the old lines of division have lost their sharpness, while new ones have appeared running right across the old. Consequently it is extremely unlikely that, if we were given the opportunity of dividing up Christendom according to its present differences, the limits of the various denominations would fall even approximately where they lie today. There is an element of unreality in the present situation that makes it increasingly hard to bear.

Whether for this reason or a variety of others, it is certain that in this generation the project of the reunion of Christendom has taken on an urgency that it has never exhibited since the Reformation. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth', and the movements of the Spirit are unpredictable. From time to time some aspect of affairs strikes the mind with a new seriousness, some

1. John 17:21.



phrase of the Scriptures, hitherto almost disregarded, acquires a new force. So the Church of the last century awoke to the plain meaning of 'Go into all the world', and made the nineteenth the greatest missionary century in all history. The present century has seen the same awakening to the significance of the prayer 'That they all may be one', and out of that awakening has sprung the Ecumenical Movement, which has already shown itself the most important feature of twentieth century ecclesiastical history.

No doubt the influence of the First World War gave an impetus to the desire for unity. In any case the year 1920 saw three steps taken, which although they were not immediately followed up, yet did mark a position from which further advance was more easily possible. The first was a plan conceived in Philadelphia, U.S.A., for a federal union of evangelical churches in America, which, if accepted, would lead ultimately to organic union. The Philadelphia Plan was rejected by the Presbyterians and fell through for the time being, but it is still regarded as the natural basis for future discussion.<sup>1</sup>

The second step was a very welcome but somewhat surprising overture from the Orthodox. It was in the form of an encyclical letter addressed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople 'to all the churches of Christ, wherever they be' (note the form), and calling for closer intercourse and better mutual understanding between the several churches. The third step was the famous Appeal issued by the Lambeth Conference of that same year to all Christian churches on behalf of the bishops of the Anglican Communion, affirming that 'terms of union having been otherwise satisfactorily adjusted, Bishops and clergy of our Communion would willingly accept from these authorities [i.e. the ordaining authority of the other bodies] a form of commission or recognition which would commend our ministry to their congregations as having its place in the one family life.'

Under the inspiration of Archbishop William Temple the enthusiasm engendered by these and similar pronouncements was not allowed to die down. Two organizations were keeping the leaders of the various churches in touch with each other: 'Faith

1. See Rouse and Neill, *History of the Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 445-8.

and Order' encouraged theological discussion, while 'Life and Work' encouraged cooperation in common tasks. In addition there was an International Missionary Council, which endeavoured to reconcile policies in the mission field, and there was also the Student Christian Movement, which sought to develop personal religion among undergraduates along intellectual and inter-confessional lines. Out of these converging interests it was sought to produce some common organization in which all the churches could combine to find means of closer cooperation. Eventually at Amsterdam in 1948 the representatives of 160 churches from nearly 50 nations formally constituted a World Council of Churches. A further great conference held in Evanston (Chicago) in 1954 demonstrated the world-wide interest in the Ecumenical Movement thus inaugurated, and further elaborated the machinery of the World Council. It is to be understood that this Council 'is in no sense a super-Church nor can it legislate for the constituent Churches. It provides a common meeting-ground for discussion, and an instrument for common action and for the expression of a common mind in face of world needs.'<sup>1</sup> That there was plenty of ground for practical cooperation was seen as the result of two World Wars. The work the Council has already done on behalf of the refugees suffering from the shift of populations in the last World War is eloquent testimony to the services it has rendered in the practical sphere.

When one comes to ask what progress has been made in the actual reunion of the churches, one finds that there has been far greater advance than is generally recognized. It is natural and proper that amalgamation should first occur between those bodies that already have approximately the same constitution and confession of faith. Thus in 1929 two Presbyterian bodies, the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, came together, though not without leaving nearly 25,000 Free Churchmen behind. Similarly the greater number of Methodists both in this country and in the U.S.A. have been united. Again, where churches of different confessions have combined, it was natural that those which were closest to each other in doctrine and polity should find the quickest way to amalgamation. The Roman Church has

1. Wand, *History of the Modern Church*, p. 290.



been surprisingly ready to acquiesce in the retention of local customs by those who were willing to acknowledge the Papal supremacy. Thus she has been able to join to herself a number of what are called Uniate churches, chiefly drawn from the Christians of the East.

In much the same way a number of the churches of the evangelical tradition have been able to unite, though in their case there has been genuine union rather than submission. Thus in 1925 the United Church of Canada was formed out of the amalgamation of four separate bodies. The process was found so successful that other bodies were subsequently drawn in. It is said that the United Church of Canada has now brought within its fold no fewer than forty distinct denominations, of which Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists were the largest. On a smaller scale the Reformed Church of France, whose first Constituent Assembly was held in 1938, represents the union of a number of evangelical bodies.

It may be asked whether it has ever been found possible to unite churches of different traditions, those, for instance, which pride themselves on belonging to the succession of the ancient historic past with those which pride themselves on being the product of the Reformation. This of course is a much severer test of the willingness to accommodate each other. The ethos of churches on opposite sides of that dividing line has developed in very different directions. Their method of government, their liturgy, the adjuncts of their worship, to say nothing of the detailed expression of their faith, are all different. It would be a miracle if an episcopal and a non-episcopal church could unite.

Yet the miracle has happened. The Church of South India is an example of it. In 1947 a million Indian Christians of Methodist, Congregationalist, and Anglican obedience joined together to form one church of that name. It comprises fourteen dioceses. The five Anglican bishops already functioning in the area were re-elected and nine new bishops, some Indian and some European, were consecrated for the remaining dioceses from among the clergy of the various uniting churches. In order to be free to effect this union the Anglican dioceses left the Anglican communion, but with the goodwill of the Lambeth Conference. It

is hoped that after the lapse of the agreed thirty years interval it will be possible for the whole Church of South India to enter into full communion with the Anglican churches. So well does this experiment appear to be working out that somewhat similar schemes, but with amendments suggested by experience, are likely to be put into effect both for North India and for Ceylon.

In Germany a somewhat looser form of common organization has been reached. The Evangelical Church in that country regards itself as 'a Church in process of coming into existence'. It unites Lutheran, Reformed, and other Christians of evangelical tradition in a common fellowship, but it respects the confessional basis of the member churches. Apparently it expects that basis to be retained, even as the Lutherans, for instance, retain their own name. A somewhat similar solution seems to have been found in China, the respective confessions retaining their identity.

Meanwhile the bonds have been drawn closer between episcopal churches, that is, those that accept bishops as the proper ordaining authority. One of the main bridges of this interconnection has been the body of Old Catholics, a group of small national churches which have at various times separated from Rome and are now to be found in three main sections: the Church of Utrecht, in Holland; a group in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland; and the National Polish Church (mostly in the U.S.A.). They have come near to effecting complete inter-communion with the Orthodox, but no final step is yet possible since for political reasons the latter are unable at present to summon a General Synod.

In 1931 the Old Catholics set up with the Anglican Communion the Agreement of Bonn. This agreement may well form a precedent for similar negotiations with other churches. Its essential provisions are as follows:

1. Each Communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
2. Each Communion agrees to permit members of the other Communion to participate in its Sacraments.
3. Inter-communion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or



liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

On this basis, although there is no business merger or organizational amalgamation, there is complete inter-communion between the two bodies, and the two have taken part in each other's consecration of bishops.

A somewhat similar arrangement exists between the Church of England and the Churches of Sweden and Finland respectively. Both these latter churches are Lutheran and both present features that are foreign to the Anglican way of life. They allow Confirmation by ministers other than bishops and they are each in communion with a number of churches with whom the Anglicans are not in communion. But these dissimilarities have not prevented steps towards effective inter-communion.

There are many other negotiations going on either for close *rapprochement* between various churches or for eventual union, but it is not fully germane to our purpose to enumerate them. Enough has been said to show that there is an impressive movement towards Christian unity, that it has already achieved marked success, and that the scandal of a divided Christendom is being gradually, if slowly, reduced.

## PART THREE

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### The Soul of the Church





## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *The Church in Idea*

WE began this book in the most objective manner possible by thinking of the effect of the Church in society. We then discussed its material constitution, what might be called the body of the Church. We must now move nearer the centre of our subject and consider the Church in its inner meaning – what we might call the soul of the Church.

First we must ask what is the nature of the Church, what it is in itself. Our observations so far have shown us how it appears to the outward eye, but we should like to know how this empirical knowledge of the Church agrees with the doctrine concerning it as taught to its own people. Obviously it is not easy to frame a definition of an entity that appears in so many different forms. Perhaps the easiest description, and that which begs fewest questions, is that which would naturally occur to any layman: 'The Church is the society of Christian people.' That, as we have already seen, is the common journalistic use of the term and it is the one that has underlain what we have been trying to say so far. It is clear however that if we are to probe to the heart of its meaning the definition will require a good deal of analysis and explanation.

In the first place the term 'society' may seem too strong for an organization or a movement that contains within itself so many different and distinct societies. Nevertheless, it is important to retain the notion of the Church as a visible organization with its distinctive rites of initiation and membership. It is true that there are a few who still prefer to think of the Church as an invisible entity whose numbers are known only to God. They are, however, overruled by the common consent of the vast bulk of Christian opinion, and even those who were once most inclined to that view now appear convinced that in the New Testament the Church is regarded as a visible society easily recognizable not only by God but by men. Indeed the very title 'World Council



of Churches', which is the name the Ecumenical Movement gives to its central organization, is itself an assertion that there are visible and recognizable societies of Christians that can consult with one another.

There is, however, an important sense in which at least some part of the Church is invisible. The Church in its entirety does not consist merely of Christians now living. It is an essential part of the Christian faith that those who die in the fellowship of Christ rise again to a new life beyond the grave. They do not therefore cease to be members of the Church when they pass from this mortal life. They are still 'in Christ', and are not cut off from their fellow-Christians living on this earth. 'The communion of saints' is an article of the Christian creed. Our notion of the Church must therefore be large enough to include the invisible 'cloud of witnesses' who 'without us shall not be made perfect', and who with us expect the final consummation of all things. In this sense the Church is 'mankind redeemed in Christ'.<sup>1</sup>

As far as this present world is concerned it is now generally agreed that the Church is, and was intended to be, a visible society. It is the community of those who recognize themselves as redeemed in Christ. They all believe that with him they have entered upon the way of salvation. It is extremely important that they should so recognize themselves as members of a fellowship. Man was not meant to live alone. A religion which appealed merely to his individualism would meet only half his needs. Even the development of personality depends largely upon the community. An individual who grew up from the cradle to the grave on a desert island without contact with fellow human beings, would, one imagines, develop no more than a fragmentary personality. If society is thus necessary for personal growth, it must be at least equally necessary for religious development.

We may believe then that the Church is intended to meet the normal needs of human nature. As we are born by nature into a physical family, so we are born by grace into a spiritual family.

It has also to be remembered that our fallen condition demands a social remedy. Sin, which is universal, does not only corrupt

1. *Doctrine in the Church of England* (SPCK 1938), p. 106.

each individual personality, but enters into the common life of humanity. Everything that man does in cooperation with his fellows, all his science, art, literature, culture, civilization, is tainted with the same disease. Such a corporate malady calls for a corporate cure. Communal sin demands a communal redemption. Christ came to save his *people* from their sins, not a number of isolated individuals, but Israel (either old or new) viewed as a nation or a community. It may be that in the first century of our era the solidarity of the race was more easily conceived than it has been by modern western thought. But in the new 'age of collective man' we have recovered something of the notion of corporateness. It may be for that reason that there is so strong a revival of interest in the idea of the Church. Certainly there is today a more widely diffused emphasis on the essentially visible nature of the Church on earth than there has been for the last two centuries. Christ himself compared the kingdom to leaven. It is only a *society* that can permeate the whole community of mankind and change its character from within.

That this emphasis is in entire accord with the New Testament admits of little doubt. Indeed a less biassed and more scholarly study of the scriptures has been one of the reasons for its emergence. It is recognized that in Judaism, the cradle of Christianity, there was never the least room for the idea of a purely invisible Church. The Jewish Church was coterminous with the nation, and even proselytes who wished to enter it had to be received into the national covenant by circumcision. As we have seen, the Christian community was at first regarded as an enclave within Judaism. Under the teaching of Stephen, Paul, and their associates it cleared itself from its Jewish fetters and stood out against the contemporary background of Judaism and Paganism as an entity in itself, with its own form of initiation and its own independent organization. The twin notes of authority and unity were struck with extreme force by Paul and John, but other leaders worked to the same end. The lesson was reinforced by the persecution the emergent Church had to endure from both the main elements in its contemporary background, Roman and Jew. In consequence the idea of the Church was just about as definite and concrete as anything could be.



Curiously enough in view of the early history, it was not the idea of the Church but of the Kingdom that tended to vagueness. Jesus revolutionized and spiritualized the Messianic expectation. The Kingdom would not be the nationalist, armed Kingdom of a David *redivivus*, but the rule of God in men's hearts and lives, in a perfected society, and ultimately in heaven. It would not be confined to the nation of the Jews but many would come from the east and west and would sit down in it along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The stories Jesus told to illustrate the nature of the Kingdom have the same idealist cast. By contrast the only two references he is said to have made to his Church have a definitely concrete character: 'Upon this rock I will build my Church',<sup>1</sup> and 'Tell it unto the Church: and if he refuse to hear the Church . . .'<sup>2</sup> The contrast has often been noticed, sometimes in a manner not at all complimentary to the Church. So Tyrrell said 'Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God but it was the Church that came.' True enough: but the two conceptions were not intended to be identical. It is only in the final *dénouement*, in the consummation of all things, that the ecclesiastical society will catch up with the Kingdom and God will be all in all.

In the meantime we do well to study the nature of the visible church as it is now and has been from the beginning. Here we have the help of the creed, which gives us the four characteristic notes, or marks, of the Church as expressed in the epithets one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

*One.* This is the note of unity so vigorously sounded in the New Testament. Jesus himself prayed for the unity of his followers, and grounded it in the unity of himself with his Father. 'That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us.'<sup>3</sup> St Paul saw the ground of the Christians' unity in the fact that the Church was the body of Christ. There can be no division between the limbs of the body. Today it is possible to maintain that in spite of the all too obvious disunity of the Church there is still an underlying unity, which is all the stronger for being so deep-seated. Christians are Christians all the world over. They not only bear the same name but they belong to the same family. If members of the same family

1. Matt. 16:18.

2. Matt. 18:17.

3. John 17:21.

quarrel, that does not destroy their blood-relationship. Certainly all Christians who have been baptized into Christ are one in him, however far apart may be the Churches into which they are gathered.

It is true that 'schisms' exist. In the traditional interpretation of the word that was taken to mean that certain small bodies of Christians had been cut off, on their own or others' initiative, from the main body. In the more charitable mood engendered by the Ecumenical Movement it is taken more generally today as implying that since Christendom as a whole has become sectionalized every distinct body of Christians is in schism. Certainly if we use the term 'Church' in the somewhat loose and general fashion in which we have so often used it in this book, it is not difficult to recognize that every part of the Christian community throughout the world is in schism from some other part or parts. As we shall see, however, there are other and more limited uses of the designation 'Church' which make the traditional interpretation of schisms seem more appropriate.

*Holy.* The Church is holy in the sense that it is the Church of the Living God whose very nature is holiness. It is holy in the sense that it is the Body of Christ, who was the sinless man. It is holy in that it is the special sphere of operation of the Holy Spirit. It is holy in the sense that each and all of its members are dedicated to the service of God in all holiness of living. It is *not* holy in the sense that all its members are morally perfect. As far as its earthly membership goes holiness represents the goal rather than the performance. This has not always been understood. From the Donatists of the fifth century down to some of the more obscure sects of the present day, repeated attempts have been made to adopt a perfectionist view of the Church and to admit to its membership only such as were already of an approved character. In defence against such innovations it has always been held that, in the time-worn phrase, 'the Church is not a museum of saints but a school for sinners.'

The work of the Church is to influence the formation of character: in fact it has been the greatest school of character the world has ever known. Granted that the person to be admitted comes in faith and penitence, then he is on his way to be made



holy through the work of Christ and through the power of his Holy Spirit, with whom he makes contact in the Church. The desire for such holiness is characteristic of all genuine members of the Church, and it has been the imperative passion of its saints and heroes. Paul, Augustine, Francis, Ignatius, Wesley, Pusey, all have experienced it as the dominant influence in their lives. Only when the desire for holiness appears totally lost, and the member is not only criminous but impenitent, does the Church feel justified in excluding him from her sacraments.

*Catholic.* The term by derivation means 'general' or 'universal'. As a theological term it was first used in the second century by Ignatius of Antioch. He took it to mean the whole Church in distinction from the many local churches. Presently it began to be used of the Great Church in distinction from the various bodies that were regarded as heretical or schismatic and were in consequence cut off from it. It therefore began to acquire the additional sense of 'orthodox'. The term was thus long used in the combined sense of the great or world-wide Church and the one that taught the orthodox faith. In this sense it applies particularly to the undivided Church down to the Great Schism between east and west in 1054. Thereafter, although each half laid claim to be the sole heir of the double significance, the West or Latin Church has been more popularly styled 'Catholic' and the East or Greek Church has been known as 'Orthodox'.

Since the Reformation Roman Catholics have often claimed the title 'Catholic' for themselves exclusively. Others however, such as Anglicans and Old Catholics, have adopted a 'branch' theory of the Church, holding that Romans and Orthodox alike, with themselves and with all others who have preserved the apostolic ministry and doctrine, are branches of the world-wide and orthodox Catholic Church. This, of course, puts a premium on the idea of apostolic succession which many of the post-Reformation churches would not allow. It is possible that these more modern churches, although they retain the word in the creed, nevertheless use it in a far more diffused and general sense, implying little more than that there *is* a great body of Christians scattered throughout the world, among which they themselves are numbered.

There is, however, one further sense of the word which is more generally recognized and has become of special importance in recent years. It is used to distinguish the whole of that type of theology that emphasizes the churchly, sacramental, authoritative, corporate character of the Christian religion over against the individual, personal, emotional, voluntary, biblical side. It is now quite customary to describe the former as Catholic and the latter as Evangelical (or Protestant). In ecumenical circles this distinction is recognized as the great dividing line that runs down the very centre of Christianity. It is often in fact regarded as an unbridgeable gulf, but we have already seen reason to doubt such a pessimistic conclusion.

*Apostolic.* The term 'apostolic' suggests that the Church of to-day is the same institution as that which was 'founded upon the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone'. The emphasis is thus on continuity. The Church is the same Church throughout the Christian ages. No doubt there was an earlier Church, that of Judaism; but it was refounded upon the teaching, life, and person of Christ and started a new history in a new dispensation. The term 'apostolic' affirms that it has persisted ever since and still persists.

If it is asked how this continuity of identity can be proved, the answer is, 'By the unbroken succession of the ministry'. That is what gives its special importance to the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession. It is not merely that there is some special grace or power given to each successive officer or generation of officers but that the authority to minister is conveyed in an unbroken line. Historians may dispute whether that authority has always been conveyed tactually, that is by the actual touch of the ordaining minister's hand upon the ordinand's head, or whether there has been at times some other means of recognizing the successor in office; but the actual fact of the succession in the Great or Catholic Church is hardly in dispute.

It is often said that something more is needed to preserve the continuity of the Church than such a mechanical succession; it is at least necessary to continue also in the apostles' doctrine. That is true enough, but the answer is that the continuity of the ministry has been by and large the best guarantee of the



continuity of the doctrine. That is already suggested in the New Testament with its double emphasis upon authority and unity, and it was openly stated by Irenaeus towards the end of the second century. If Ignatius had seen the episcopate as the great guarantee of persistence against persecution, Irenaeus saw it as the guarantee of purity of doctrine against the corrosive effect of current heresies. Certainly it can be pointed out that such an argument was more powerful in the early centuries than it is today. After this lapse of years some parts of the Church that have preserved the apostolic ministry may seem to have departed a long way from the apostolic doctrine. Nevertheless the Christian of a Catholic turn of mind can still say that Christ promised the presence of his Spirit to be with his Church and to lead it into all truth. So long as the outward identity of the Church is maintained, there is always the conviction that ultimately it will be led into all truth even if it means for a time retracing one's steps.

Sometimes it is complained that precisionists have spoilt the spiritual quality of the doctrine of the Church by over-emphasizing the external and formal succession of the ministry. A more sympathetic understanding of the position can be reached if the sacramental character of the Church is borne in mind. One's regard for the inward grace of a sacrament leads properly and inevitably to a certain veneration for the outward means by which the grace is conferred. The continuity of the ministry is the outward sign of the continued presence of Christ in and with his Church; and even if this were, to put it at its lowest, no more than mere symbolism, one would wish to pay due respect to the symbol of so serene a mystery.

On the purely historical ground it might be added that the continuity of the ministry is the plainest evidence of the earthly life of Christ. Jesus wrote no book, built no monument. Even the Eucharist is sometimes ruled out as evidence of historicity, owing to the possible influence of the mystery cults. But to explain the existence of the ministry on any other ground than its derivation from the apostles whom Jesus chose would require ingenuity or prejudice of a surprising degree. From the point of view of its value as historical evidence the continuity, unbroken

from the apostolic times to the present day, is obviously of considerable importance. All this is involved in the title 'apostolic'.

The four distinctive marks of the Church are thus seen to be its unity, its holiness, its catholicity, and its apostolicity. At present, as is all too obvious, it has none of these qualities in perfection. That is only to say that the condition of the Church is not static but dynamic. It possesses these qualities at least in embryo, and it is its privilege to foster their growth to maturity. We do not yet see it completely united, holy, or catholic, and if it is apostolic in ministry it still lacks much of apostolic fervency and zeal. But we can still see sufficient of those qualities to enable us to recognize the justice of the description given in the Anglican Article XIX: 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful [i.e. believing] men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *The Function of the Church* (A) *Worship*

THE Church is not a static body. It is not just an organization, a mere piece of machinery. It is an organism with a life of its own. It is therefore dynamic, having power to move and to start movement in others. In other words it is not an end in itself: it looks beyond itself and has a function to perform. Or rather it has a double function, a duty both to God and to mankind. In this respect it reminds one of the summary of the Mosaic Law: to love God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength and one's neighbour as oneself. So the Church's double duty is to worship God and to proclaim him to mankind. In this chapter we deal with the first of these two functions, that of worship.

If the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever, then worship must be a prime need of human nature. For to worship God is to glorify him, not in the sense of adding to something he already possesses or of giving to him something he does not already possess, but of recognizing, deliberately and openly, a glory, an honour, a value, a worth that are already there. If we are allowed to think of God in anthropomorphic terms, then we cannot doubt that such recognition gives satisfaction to him, just as any human parent is pleased by his children's recognition of his place in their lives and by their profession of esteem for him. Poetic minds have often relished the thought that the whole creation joins together in praise of its maker. However fanciful that may seem with regard to the inanimate world, it is surely natural that all thinking creatures should feel this notion of gratitude towards the one who brought them into existence. Whether it is the angels in their song 'Glory to God in the highest', or the veteran Salvationist interjecting 'Glory, glory' in the pauses of a prayer or sermon, or the devout Anglican with his '*Gloria*' at the end of each psalm, all alike fulfil the end of their

being by proclaiming the glory of him from whom their being is derived.

This is the answer to those who think that worship is somehow unpractical and therefore a waste of time. The fact is that it is the most practical thing there is. It actually determines our whole attitude to the world. If we start off by reverencing God as the maker and sustainer of the universe, then we are likely to have the right kind of attitude to everything else we meet in life. But if we start off with a kind of cockney conceit, putting out our tongue in the face of existence – ‘Glory to *man* in the highest, for man is the maker of things’ – then we are likely to be out of step with the universe for the rest of our lives. It is not for nothing that in the old-fashioned marriage service the bridegroom says to the bride ‘With my body I thee worship.’ So much depends upon the attitude with which you start. If the groom does start off from the point of real reverence and respect for the bride, there is a much better prospect of a happy and abiding union than if such respect be lacking.

It is not the least important element in the practical aspect of the Church’s worship that it is corporate. It brings people together and unites them in a common purpose and a common love. It is a recognition of a family relationship, a relationship both to the head of the family and to the fellow-members. The idea that one can be a perfect Christian by keeping oneself to oneself is quite erroneous. There may be some individuals whom God calls to serve him in complete solitude, but that is a special call and requires a very special grace for its adequate fulfilment. The normal call admits of no doubt whatever: it is to worship God in the company of our fellows. This does not of course exclude our private prayers and devotions, any more than full family life ignores our need of privacy. For our complete development as persons we need both the fellowship of society and also periods during which we are thrown on our individual resources. It is the same with worship: for its perfection we need both corporate and private prayer.

In either case the real importance of worship lies in the fact that it directs our thoughts Godwards. In normal, everyday life material and temporal concerns are constantly with us. We are



inevitably occupied with the money we earn, the food we eat, the clothes we wear. We believe what we see and value what we handle. Everything, we think in our pessimistic moods, conspires to shut out the thought of heaven. Out of sight is out of mind; and it is only with great difficulty that we can live, even for fleeting moments, in the thought of eternity. For this reason, if we are ever to meet the claims of our higher nature, some special efforts at worship are necessary.

Few things are clearer in the teaching of Jesus than the care with which he inculcated the belief that earth and heaven are closely associated with each other. Perhaps the Hebrews with their low-ceilinged, three storied universe consisting of heaven, earth, and hell, found it easier to envisage the closeness of that relationship than we do in the western culture of the twentieth century. For us the limits of the universe have receded so far and we have developed such truly 'astronomical' figures to probe its distances, that it is much more difficult to envisage a heaven that is near at hand. Even if we are told that we must not think of heaven in spatial terms at all and even if we are assured that eternity is just as near to us at any one point of time as at any other, the childish idea of heaven as somewhere 'beyond the skies' still remains, and the more remote the 'sky' has become under the teaching of modern science, the further we feel ourselves from heaven. It is rather like Australian notions of the 'bush', which recedes further and further as you leave the town.

Wordsworth in a well-known ode could say that heaven 'lies about us in our infancy'. Jesus, who was less of a sentimentalist, taught his disciples that they entered the Kingdom of Heaven from the moment of their association with him. They were already in the New Age and the kingdom was the sphere in which earth and heaven met. It was the porch to the New Jerusalem, the bridge that joined time and eternity. So whatsoever the apostles 'bound' on earth was bound in heaven: the arrangements made by them for the good government of the Church were to be regarded as having divine sanction. They were not to expect any very obvious signs or portents as evidence of the coming of the Kingdom: it would steal upon them silently, 'without observation', and they would only recognize it when they realized that

they were already within it. But they were to look forward to its universal recognition, and were to pray that God's will would be done in earth as it is in heaven.

It follows from this teaching that the effect of worship, the response to the bidding 'Lift up your hearts', is to cross the narrow dividing line between earth and heaven. As St Paul was so fond of reminding his readers, the Christian already thus 'dwells in the heavenlies'. The effect upon the worshippers' disposition and character must be cumulative. The more he practises such worship, the more he habitually thinks and acts from the point of view of the spiritual realities. The Lambeth Fathers in their last report put this thought in more than usually ecstatic terms when they said, 'In the worship of Almighty God we know creation's secret force.' Certainly the worshipper 'in spirit and in truth' is conscious of a new vitality, a fresh inspiration, a new desire and capacity for creative effort. The pundits may ascribe this effect to what is known as 'crowd psychology', and, if we are right in what we have already said, there is no reason to fear or regret the influence of fellow-worshippers. But nothing is likely to persuade the true worshipper that he has not been in personal contact with the object of his adoration or that he has not received direct from God whatever rejuvenation of the spirit he enjoys.

Christian worship, as practised in the historic churches, is found in two main forms, the Daily Office and the Eucharist. The former consists mainly in the recitation of the Psalter with the addition of lessons from the Scriptures, certain canticles and prayers. It is probable that in its chief features it derives from the synagogue worship of Judaism. In Acts 2:42 we read of the primitive Christian community continuing 'in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers', where the expression '*the* prayers' almost certainly implies some sort of stereotyped liturgy. The fact that they were able to take this over together with the Old Testament from the synagogue and adapt it to their own immediate use must have been one of the reasons for the early and rapid success of the earliest Christian missionaries.



Very early this scheme developed into a regular round of daily services, and was later elaborated into a sevenfold system, modelled on the text 'seven times a day will I praise thee' (Ps. 119: 164). It is possible that this development was influenced by the customs of the Desert Fathers, the Egyptian solitaries of the fourth and following centuries, who were wont to meet together for the night vigil. Their prayers and praises coalesced into the forms known as Vespers, Mattins, and Lauds, recited at intervals during the night. The day offices of Terce, Sext, and None were said at 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. respectively. These six offices were taken over by the monasteries. There the common life led to two additions. Prime was originally the family prayer of the monks on rising for the day. Compline was similarly the night prayer of the community before retiring to rest: it was an addendum (*completorium*) to fill in and complete the daily round. Thus the whole of time was sanctified by the setting aside of these special intervals for the service of God.

Throughout the medieval period this round of services was known as the *opus Dei*, the work of God, addressed to him and not intended for the edification of man. The monks offered it together as a family, as they still do, Orthodox, Roman, and Anglican alike. The secular clergy said their office either with their people or privately, as occasion served. At the Reformation in England Cranmer, wishing to make the services more popular and to bring them within the range of universal observance, condensed them into two for each day, Mattins and Evensong (or Morning and Evening Prayer), and translated them into memorable English. In the Church of England in collegiate and parish churches these two offices are by rubric recited every day, and form the back-bone of the worshipping life of the Church. The main element in them is still the regular recitation of the Psalter, which is completed each month, but to it has been added extensive reading from the Old and New Testaments.

The character of the Psalter is best described by the name often given to it by Old Testament scholars, 'the hymn book of the second Temple'. On its religious value and its place in public worship we cannot do better than quote Miss Evelyn Underhill<sup>1</sup>:

1. *Worship*, pp. 105-6.

These, and other great utterances of the Psalmists, recited again and again as the expression of the Church's adoring trust, have now entered so deeply into the very texture of Christian devotion that we have ceased to be aware of their range of influence. Yet it is mainly by means of the Psalms that both the historic and spiritual continuity of Christian corporate worship has been secured; and in them we have an inexhaustible storehouse of devotional material and a means of common prayer and adoration which is accepted as it stands by Christians of every type. Thus in opening the Psalter we open a door which admits us as no other can to the worship of the Universal Church; her penitence, her supplication, her invulnerable confidence, her adoring delight in the splendour of God. Here Catholic and Covenanter sing from one service book, and acknowledge themselves to be brothers under their skins. In due course the Psalter became the core of the Divine Office; and by this very circumstance has fed and coloured the worship of all the generations of the saints.

The other main type of Christian worship is to be found in the Eucharist. Like the Daily Office this form of worship also harks back to Jewish custom, not so much to that of the temple or even of the synagogue, but to the fellowship meals that Jewish families and friends were accustomed to hold in their homes, particularly on great religious occasions. On the night before his death Jesus held such a meal with his disciples. Its close association with the Passover and his own self-offering lent to it the overtones of a new covenant sealed by a sacrifice. In pronouncing, as head of the company, the customary thanksgiving over the bread and the wine Jesus spoke of these elements as his Body and Blood, of which his disciples were to partake.

After Jesus's ascension we find his followers frequently repeating this rite. It is presumably the 'breaking of bread' spoken of in connexion with the prayers. It soon becomes the distinguishing feature of corporate Christian life. It is celebrated at least on the first day of the week, in commemoration of Christ's resurrection, and as the Lord's service it appears to give its name to the Lord's Day. St Paul is particularly insistent that people should take the right view of it, celebrate it with the correct formula, and approach it with proper reverence. (1 Cor. 11:23 ff.)



What is the right view of it has been much disputed. Some have seen in it no more than an act of commemoration; others have thought that its main significance is to point to the future and the banquets of the Messianic Kingdom; some have thought it a representation or even a repetition of the sacrifice of himself offered by Jesus on the cross of Calvary; others regard it as identical with that one sacrifice because it belongs to eternity and not merely to a particular moment in time; some think of it as a mere pictorial representation of the body and blood of Christ; others think of the consecrated elements as conveying spiritual graces to the recipient; some think of those elements as the instrument of Christ's personality by which he communicates himself to the believer; others again think of them as being somehow the material flesh and blood of Christ miraculously renewed upon the altar.

The effort has often been made to reduce the rite to its simplest possible explanation, as just a commemorative token meal, but the effort has never provided lasting satisfaction. Always there is a numinous quality that reasserts itself and demands a profounder exegesis. In consequence the tendency is for this service to occupy a central position in the life of the community and in the practice of the devout communicant. This is as true of some of the newest sects as it was of the early Church. From being celebrated every week it soon began to be celebrated daily: indeed it was accepted as the 'daily bread' spoken of in the Lord's Prayer, and even in the second century there were circles in which it was customary to take home a supply of consecrated Hosts (or Breads) for daily use when it was not possible to go out to church. In the late Middle Ages, as still in the Roman communion, each priest was expected to say his Mass every day, a practice that is voluntary but widespread in the Anglican Communion. The necessity of providing sufficient altars for this purpose has actually affected the architectural planning of church buildings.

It is obvious that a type of worship having so many different aspects may be difficult to grasp and comprehend in its entirety. Perhaps the easiest method is to remember the different names by which the service is known. 'The Lord's Supper' suggests

the purely commemorative aspect. 'The Holy Communion' implies a common sharing in holy things, in this case the Body and Blood of Christ. 'Eucharist' is simply the Greek word for 'Thank you' and applies both to the blessing over the bread and wine and to the whole tone and temper of the service, which is that of a great thanksgiving. Finally the name 'Mass', which simply comes from the dismissal at the close of the service and has no theological significance of its own, is a convenient peg upon which to hang the notion of the service as a sacrifice. Since the very idea of sacrifice in this connexion has been severely questioned, it is well to remember that the Eucharist may be regarded as a sacrifice in at least four senses: of praise and thanksgiving; of bread and wine; of ourselves, our souls and bodies; and of Christ, whose self-offering, as was suggested above, is eternal: in it we are permitted in a sacramental fashion to share.

One would have expected the glorifying of God to be an obvious bond of union between the churches. Unfortunately it is in their contrasted manner of worship that the differences between the various denominations become most obvious to the ear and eye. The line of demarcation follows with considerable exactness the division between Catholic and Evangelical. The historic churches favour the liturgical manner of worship already described, while the post-Reformation churches for the most part eschew a stereotyped liturgy and concentrate on extemporary prayer and modern hymns. The reading of scripture is happily common to all.

It would scarcely be too much to say that the sharp contrast in methods of worship has continued so long that it has produced two opposite types of mentality. The catholic-minded Christian, although he may be quite accustomed to extemporary prayer in private, appears quite unable to appreciate or even to follow such prayer when offered by the minister in public worship. By the same token the evangelically-minded Christian finds liturgical prayer cold, formal, archaic, and almost meaningless.

The difference is perhaps at its greatest where the Eucharist is concerned. It is true that there must be much the same use in



the hallowing of the bread and wine when the words of the original institution of the Lord's Supper are used, and there must be essentially the same ritual act in the reception of one or both of the elements. To take, to bless, to break, to give are the essential ministerial acts of Christ and his followers alike. But there the similarity between Catholic and Evangelical custom ends; though one exception must be made in the case of some Lutheran countries, where, in spite of a generally evangelical ethos, the framework of the medieval liturgy has been preserved. Normally, however, it remains true that there could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the Lord's Supper as celebrated in a non-conformist chapel and High Mass as celebrated in a Roman or Anglican church. (It could justifiably be retorted, however, that the contrast would be less obvious in the case of Low Mass, which is celebrated without music or elaborate ceremonial.)

This contrast is not due to any merely adventitious difference of taste. It has its origin in a really important difference of emphasis. The question is whether Christianity is an essentially sacramental religion or not. Practically all Christians (with the possible exception of the Quakers and the Salvation Army) accept the sacraments in some sense. But to some worshippers they are merely picturesque excrescences on the simple gospel, while to others they are the heart of the gospel. Naturally those who take the latter view will give the greater honour to the public celebration of the sacraments. In the historic Church all the great arts have made their contribution to the splendour and glory of the Eucharist. Of music in particular it may be said that some of its greatest masterpieces have been composed to this end. When the same importance is not attached to the sacraments it is hardly likely that the same trouble will be taken to enhance the splendour of their public celebration. Hence the devastating difference in types of worship, a difference that is felt to an appreciable extent not only between different churches but even within individual communions. Conspicuous examples are the Lutheran and Anglican, whose members are divided as they tend to lean to the one side or the other.

Modern habits, however, are already beginning to soften the hard lines of demarcation. Owing to the radio and television

Christians of different types, who would never dream of going into each other's churches, are becoming familiar with each other's mode of worship. Some post-Reformation churches, such as the Church of Scotland, are experimenting with liturgical forms and their theologians are beginning to show a greater interest in the science of liturgiology. A better knowledge of early church history is making many who had hitherto leapt the gap between the first and the sixteenth centuries realize how large a part the sacraments have always played in Christian living. Many traditionally-minded Christians have been led by new studies in the New Testament to realize how large a part the purely extempore played in the worship of the primitive Church. Finally, the recent erection of new towns or suburbs, with the consequent assemblage of new populations, has given the parochial clergy the opportunity of making a fresh start in the arrangement of services. This has been found particularly advantageous to Anglicans, among whom Catholics and Evangelicals alike have acquiesced in a sung celebration of Holy Communion with sermon and hymns at some hour between 9 and 10 as the best arrangement for Sunday morning. It is possible that experiments tried out in these new areas may be copied in regions where social habits have been regarded hitherto as more rigidly fixed. In any case, if Christians of every kind show themselves alive to the fresh opportunities of a new age, it may be that old barriers will be broken down and greater unity will be established both within and between the various churches. It is at least as certain as anything can be that in the future the various types of worship will affect each other. Each will learn from all, and the Church's main function of worship will be more adequately fulfilled.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *The Function of the Church*

#### *(B) Evangelization*

IF the first function of the Church is the worship of God, its second is the evangelization and edification of man. We put worship first, as our duty towards God comes before our duty towards our neighbour. On the other hand we speak of the Church's twofold ministry as being that of 'the word and sacraments'. There the 'word' logically comes first as people must hear the word and accept it before they receive the sacraments. The question of priorities seems a purely academic one since both functions derive from the double rôle of Christ, which was to reveal the Father and to redeem mankind. The unity of the double work of revelation and redemption is there already in the person of Christ, and one would have hardly thought it worth while to raise the issue of precedence. Curiously enough, however, doubt upon this head has had its repercussions in the furnishing of church buildings. In some churches one finds the pulpit occupying the place of principal prominence, in others the altar. And of course there is a considerable variety in the amount of prominence given to the font. However, we can do no more than notice these idiosyncracies and pass on. We have dealt with the Church's function of worship: we must now turn to that of evangelization.

If we had stood or sat among the crowd listening to Jesus preaching we could not have failed to be made aware of one constant topic to which he was always referring, the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist had proclaimed the imminence of the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus took the text from his lips. It gave the topic for most of his sermons; it provided a petition in his model prayer; it was so regularly the subject of his stories that when a parable begins 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like' we recognize it as a stereotyped formula of introduction such as we are accustomed to in the children's stories, 'Once upon a time'

John the Baptist had spoken of the Kingdom as imminent, at the door, on the threshold. So did Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. However near, it was still in the future: the petition in the Lord's Prayer is a request to hasten its coming. But later (after he had himself been proclaimed as Messiah at Caesarea Philippi ?) he spoke of the Kingdom as already come. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you', or 'among you'. It may escape notice, 'it cometh not with observation', but already 'the violent take it by force'. The first duty of his hearers is to 'seek his Kingdom', and they are to enter now by the narrow gate. The fact that it is here *is* the gospel, 'the good news of the Kingdom'.

There are of course many places in which the gospels represent Jesus as speaking of the Kingdom as still future, but they need no emphasis from people of our time, as we are only too inclined to think of the Kingdom as something that belongs solely to the future; and for that reason we have not regarded it as being of present importance. Yet there can be no doubt at all of the prominent position occupied in Jesus's teaching by the subject of the Kingdom, and we must do something to restore the balance in our own understanding.

Modern theologians have recognized the importance of the subject from the point of view of academic study. They have been specially concerned to ask whether Jesus really thought of the Kingdom as present or future. Did he speak in the terms of a realized or a futurist eschatology? Did he think that the end-time had already come or that it was to come in the immediate future, that is, after his own death? In view of the superficial ambiguity of Jesus's sayings we should have thought that the answer was fairly obvious. If he was the Messiah, then the Messianic Kingdom had already begun in him. But the fact that the end-time had begun did not mean that it was fully developed, much less that it was about to end. Jesus proclaimed the beginning of a new age, a new dispensation, a new conception and means of salvation. With and in him his followers already tasted the joys and the powers that would be theirs fully hereafter. His miracles and theirs were signs of this new age of existence; the healing of the sick, the cleansing of the lepers, the casting out of devils, were tokens of the victory already won over physical,



moral, and spiritual evil. This was the Gospel, the good news: let the sons of the Kingdom claim their heritage.

Since the idea of the Kingdom loomed so large in Jesus's preaching it is clear that we should take some trouble to understand its significance. Granted that the Messianic idea is not natural to our time and culture, we can still do a good deal towards interpreting the conception in the terms of our own day. There are at least three strands in the general notion which we can regard as notes or marks of the Kingdom.

In the first place, if the 'world' is society organized apart from God, then the Kingdom is society organized under God. The Jews from the time of the first eclipse of their nation had looked forward to the day when God would reverse the catastrophe and manifestly rule among his people. The experience of the Exile, in which the state had been destroyed, had led after the Return to the development of a theocracy. An ideal constitution was thought out and expressed in picturesque language by Ezekiel. The fact that it was never translated into practical politics had not destroyed faith in its possibility, and the actualization of some such ideal became part of the Messianic expectation. This meant of course a perfect society, not away beyond the skies, but here upon earth. Jesus in his time did not try to disillusion his disciples on this topic. On the contrary he enlisted some very fervent upholders of the idea among his apostles.<sup>1</sup> All he says is that the way to accomplish this idea is not by way of armed force but by becoming little children and 'bearing his yoke'. It is by a change of heart and not by a change of policy that the nation will be saved.

Of course the importance of all this from the point of view of our own time is that it provides an aim and an ambition for the layman as well as for the priest. It means that anyone who is seriously and conscientiously trying under the leadership of Christ to improve the conditions under which his neighbours live is to that extent preparing the way for the coming of the Kingdom. It is also, for those who accept it, a guarantee that the perfection for which they strive is not some will-o'-the-wisp

1. One at least, Simon, was an avowed member of the Zealots, the most fanatical of the nationalist parties.

but a reality. In spite of all temporary disappointments it will one day be established, if not in time, then certainly in eternity; if not here, then in the new heaven and earth; if not in physical, then in spiritual conditions.

The Kingdom of God, then, is the perfect society. It is also the rule of God in the heart and life of the individual. A former generation of scholars saw in this the only meaning of the phrase. Indeed so modern a translation as the American Revised Standard Version gives as its equivalent 'the rule of God', as if 'Kingdom' referred to the act of ruling and not to the sphere in which the rule is exercised. One can quite understand a republican country being embarrassed by the notion of kingship, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the word translated 'Kingdom' does actually include the concrete idea of domain as well as the abstract idea of authority.

In any case it is clear that the single human heart is the place where the rule of God must first be acknowledged if there is to be any recognized sovereignty at all. The Kingdom does not come only in our environment but in ourselves. It is an individual as well as a communal conception. To use scriptural language, we each need to be born again, and unless we are so born we can have no part in the family. The proclamation of the Kingdom therefore is a challenge to each single person. Has the Kingdom begun with me? Has my allegiance been given to the King? Am I recognizably his loyal subject?

The third strand in this complex notion of the Kingdom is the final bliss of heaven, when Christ shall have brought all the nations into allegiance to himself, and shall have handed, in St Paul's picturesque phraseology, the Kingdom to his Father, and God shall be 'all in all'.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine is important, not only because it guarantees the finality of perfection, but also because it fixes a goal to history, 'one, far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves'.

History does not go round in circles, as the old classical authors thought, and as some of the moderns like Spengler have taught, but it moves towards a predetermined end, which will itself be a gateway opening out of time on to eternity. For those who are

1. 1 Cor. 15:24, 28.



members of the Kingdom this eternity will be the *summum bonum*, the ultimate good, the perfect bliss that shall endure without end. The criterion of fitness to enter upon this final stage of the Kingdom will be a moral one. Men will be judged by their deeds. A last discrimination will be made between good and evil. Good will be for ever triumphant and evil be effectively destroyed. The contemplation of this ultimate *dénouement* should encourage human beings in their current struggles, make them realize the importance of the present life as a training school and fill them with confidence for the future.

The three constituent elements of the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven are thus the perfect society on earth, the rule of God in the individual heart, and the final reign of God in heaven. It is within this very wide field that the Church operates. We must now ask what its function here is.

In the first place we have to notice that Church and Kingdom are not identical – at least on this earth. If we had really been among the crowd listening to Jesus preach, we should not often have heard him mention the Church. In the synoptics, as we have already seen, in contrast to the host of references to the Kingdom, there are only two to the Church. In the epistles the limits of the Kingdom are sublimely vague, those of the Church are discernible by all. The members of the Kingdom are known only to God, those of the Church have been openly admitted. The Kingdom is a movement, an influence penetrating everywhere, the professions, the legislative bodies, the domestic scene, the heart of the individual. The Church is obviously an institution.

What then is the relation of the Church to the Kingdom? It is the instrument by which the way may be prepared for the coming of the Kingdom. Its task is to gain territory for the Kingdom. It is the nucleus around which the Kingdom may gather and develop. If, as Jesus said, the Kingdom is like leaven, then the Church is like the organism that gives it the power of fermentation.

It is to be noticed that neither the Church nor any human agency can of itself bring in the Kingdom. That is in the hand of God, to grant or withhold it as he will. All that the Church can do is to prepare the way for its coming. The New Jerusalem

descends out of heaven from God : but we can model this earth of ours according to the pattern we have seen 'on the mount' and so help to diminish the disparity between earth and heaven. By such means we may even hope to hasten the coming of the Kingdom.

It is to this end that the evangelistic work of the Church is addressed. It does not matter whether it is at the far ends of the earth or among the unconverted multitudes at home : it is still the same gospel, the same proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom. We still have to persuade men that a fresh dispensation has begun, that they can enter the new age, that they can be members of Christ's Kingdom, and that that means living life in a new dimension here and now with a promise of eternal glory in the life to come. This is the 'ministry of the word' ; this is the function of evangelization to which the Church is committed. First worship and then evangelization.

Since this is one of the two main functions of the Church, it is well to enquire a little more closely into its manner of working and into the effect we expect it to produce. Normally we expect the Church to expand by natural growth. The children of Christians will themselves be Christians. But this does not quite work out. Christianity is not a matter of nature but of grace. We do not become Christians by natural birth but by spiritual rebirth. That is what is involved in the rite of baptism : it is then that we are spiritually reborn and made the children of God, members of Christ and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. If we are baptized in infancy it is not always easy to distinguish between the state of nature and the state of grace. We develop in both spheres at one and the same time and we find it hard to realize that we are living in two worlds at once. If, however, we are baptized later in life the distinction is clear enough. We have had to make a deliberate effort to establish our position in what is to us a new world and what is to all Christians the 'new age'. The distinction between nature and grace is therefore not so obscure. Even for those who were baptized in infancy there is in some churches at least the later rite of confirmation, and that usually serves the purpose of making vivid the contrast between the life in Christ and life in the world.



The purpose of evangelization, of proclaiming the gospel, must always be to arouse the sense of this difference and, having aroused it, to maintain it. One takes for granted that no one who had learned truly to appreciate the difference would have any doubt as to which side he wished to embrace. The opening of the eyes to the realities of life would imply a determination to follow Christ. It is only the blind who give their allegiance to this world. The whole process of this arousal is therefore called conversion, a thorough turning from one point of view to another, from one allegiance to another, what the New Testament calls *metanoia* or a change of mind. Such conversion may come in the form of a sudden shock, as it did to St Paul on the Damascus road. Or it may be a gradual opening of the mind, keeping pace with normal physical development, so that there is never any consciousness of shock or violent change. William James called those who had the first experience the 'twice-born', and those who had the second the 'once-born'. But whichever course is followed, the important, indeed the essential, thing is that the eyes should be opened and the choice deliberately made. Conversion is thus the psychological counterpart of the sacraments.

What kind of evangelization has most frequently led to conversion is not an easy question to answer. Gibbon, the historian, thought that in the period of the Roman Empire it was the promise of life after death. A.D. Nock, however, says that to the pagan element at least the idea of a resurrection of the body was 'strange and repellent'.<sup>1</sup> In many cases the leading cause must have been a careful presentation of the adorable figure of Christ and the attractive quality of his teaching. In others it may have been reaction against the sense of guilt, weakness, and frustration that is the common lot of humanity, and particularly so in periods characterized by 'failure of nerve'. In the majority of cases the reason for conversion is probably the more positive feeling that Christianity offers the most plausible account of existence and the most effective source of power and courage for the life of every day. The fact is that we are not pinned down to any one channel for the effectiveness of evangelization. "The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is everyone that is born of

1. A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford University Press) 1933, p. 247 ff.

the Spirit.' The reasons that bring conviction are as varied as human nature itself.

Nor are we pinned down to any narrow conception of the way in which salvation is secured. The New Testament itself speaks with a number of voices, which, although they must have struck a harmonious chord originally, have been made to seem discordant by the dialectical methods of modern scholars and partisans. Thus the key to salvation is sometimes a sheer act of faith: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' At other times it is the psychological disposition: 'Unless ye become as little children ye cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.' At others it is conduct, behaviour: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me.' At others again there is more than a touch of ecclesiastical propriety: 'He that is baptized shall be saved', 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life and I will raise him up again at the last day.' St Paul at least never seemed to perceive the slightest incongruity between these various doors to salvation. He gives equal emphasis to faith and the sacraments, to psychology and conduct. Indeed he draws them all together in one overruling requirement. What is really necessary is that we should be 'in Christ'. Incorporation into Christ is essential Christianity.

The meaning of this rich and complex conception was differently viewed later in east and west. Not that the two views contradicted each other, but they emphasized different aspects. The west laid stress on the psychological aspect, the east on the ontological. The west saw a change of mind where the east saw a change of essential nature. The characteristic western teaching was that if a person was in Christ, then he had the mind of Christ, his will was drawn up in line with God's will, he learnt to think from the spiritual point of view, to see everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. The characteristic eastern view was that to be in Christ meant a change in one's inner nature; what was mortal became immortal; indeed, a new man was born within the personality, a new man that was the individual permeated by the spirit of Christ. This new man grew to maturity as the physical body decayed, and could be transfigured, as Christ was transfigured, by going on from glory to glory, until at last it might be



possible to say, 'It is no longer I that live but Christ that liveth in me.' Thus, while the west was accustomed to use the language of conversion in the sense of a sudden change of heart,<sup>1</sup> the east used the language of growth and gradual change, and was not afraid to speak of ultimate 'deification' – not indeed in the sense that we should be made God but that we should be 'like him'.

Whatever language was habitually used all Christians alike knew, as they have always known, that the object of their evangelization was not mere conversion, however important that might be, but nothing less than perfection. The Church's function was not only to win the sinner from the error of his ways but to build up the saint. 'Be ye therefore perfect' said Christ, and the Church must do everything possible to enable its members to fulfil that obligation. So even while the work of converting the heathen and the godless went on and still goes on, the work of edification is pursued in the prayers of the hermits, the worship of the monks, the discipline of every parish priest, the teaching of every school and educational institution. To convert the world and to edify every converted member into sainthood – an impossible task and one that earns the derision of the world. Yet it is the task to which the Church was committed by its Founder: 'Go you into all the world and make disciples of all the nations.' So the Church pursues its duty of evangelization in sure and certain hope, knowing that God will never order us to do anything that he does not give us strength to perform.

1. In the Middle Ages the term was used specifically of the change from secular to monastic life. The *conversi* were the monks.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *The Inner Life of the Church*

WE have come now to the very heart and centre of our subject. We have spent a good deal of time looking at the externals of the Church, its influence in society; its organization, government, and expansion; and more recently at its function in worship and evangelization. We have recognized that we are not dealing with a mere organization or haphazard conglomeration of individuals, but with an organism, a living entity, something that carries the principle and power of life within itself. Now we have to ask: what is that principle of life? What is the quintessential element of this living organism we call the Church? The answer is that it is Christ himself. As we hope to show presently, this is no mere metaphor. There is a valid sense in which the members of the Church are much more closely united than the members of a school, a trade union, a football team. They are not drawn together solely by some common interest. Their bond of unity does not consist in some common taste or occupation. They are drawn together, indeed 'knit together', because they draw upon the reserves of a common life, and that life is Christ's.

How that can be, we hope to discuss presently, but in the meantime we must notice how impossible it is to drive a wedge between Christ and his Church. There is of course a sense in which the two can, and should, be distinguished. When Christ committed himself to his followers, leaving them to carry on in the visible sphere the work that he had begun, he 'knew what was in man', and realized as no one else could with how imperfect an instrument he was dealing. We too have always known that 'we carry our treasure in earthen vessels'. At no moment in time will the Church on earth adequately express the life of Christ within it or show itself a worthy instrument of his purposes. Yet it remains his chosen instrument. Indeed, we might say without exaggeration that it is the only specific instrument he has. For this purpose the Bible is just as much a part of the Church as are the



creeds or sacraments, and should not be considered apart from it, except in so far as a society may be subjected to examination in the light of its foundation documents. Apart from these necessary qualifications it remains true that the Church is the means here on earth of Christ's self-expression. It derives its life from him and is the instrument by which his purposes are carried out. This should become clearer as we examine some of the New Testament statements on this head.

First, there falls for consideration a number of expressions that seem at first sight metaphorical but on investigation appear to have a more than metaphorical significance. The expression 'temple', for instance, which both Peter and Paul are fond of applying to the Church, seems simple enough. The figure of an edifice is an obvious one and it had already been suggested by Jesus himself, 'On this rock will I build my Church.'<sup>1</sup> But Peter outruns the stark simplicity of the comparison by introducing the idea of a dynamic rather than a static building. He explicitly says that each member is a 'living' stone and implies that the whole building is alive.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the connecting link is to be found in the idea of worship. A temple is a place for worship, but it is the congregation, not the stones, that sing the praises, although again Jesus had led the way to the metaphor of living, worshipping stones by saying on a famous occasion that if the disciples were silenced the very stones would cry out<sup>3</sup>—and there were Old Testament parallels for that. Anyhow, we do get the idea, by whatever route, of a temple that is actually alive and does not merely resound with the praises of God but itself sings the praises.

Again, the Church is sometimes described as the Bride of Christ. No doubt the immediate emphasis is on the ideas of purity, beauty, and affection. Baptism, which is the duty and the prerogative of each individual believer, is here connected with the bridal bath which renews the vitality and youth of the whole Church. But undoubtedly the suggestion that the bride and groom become 'one flesh' lies very near. We know the characteristic Pauline conception of the personal unity brought about between bride and bridegroom by their marital intercourse. In-

1. Cf. John 2:19.

2. 1 Pet. 2:5.

3. Luke 19:40.

deed, he holds the view that sexual intercourse, even with a prostitute, involves a certain surrender to her of the personality. If man and woman thus become not only 'one flesh' but also in some degree one personality, we can understand that the Bride of Christ must in a real sense share the personality of Christ. The metaphor of the Bride thus reinforces what has already been said about that of the Temple.

But the favourite of all these metaphors with St Paul is that of a body. The Church is 'the Body of Christ'. Indeed, St Paul uses it so frequently and with so realistic a significance that some commentators are accused of wishing to regard it as no metaphor at all but a plain statement of fact. But that, of course, would be going too far. We use the term 'body' so often of a society or group of people that we are inclined to forget its metaphorical origin. A body is the physical element of a human or animal being, a complete entity in itself with its various organs and limbs. It is only by analogy that it can be transferred to a group of people, but when it is so transferred, it already implies a certain unity of interest, activity, and purpose among them.

Let us admit then that the term 'body' as applied to the Church is certainly metaphorical. But that only brings us to the beginning of our enquiry: the question is how much more is it than that. Even Dr Best, who is most anxious to preserve the metaphorical element in his elucidation of the term, affirms that it expresses the 'corporate personality' of Christ.<sup>1</sup> We should be quite content to say 'personality' *tout court*, for what is the corporate personality of an individual but a personality expressed through a body?

This in fact seems to be the real significance of the phrase. The body is the instrument of the personality. It is the means by which the personality makes itself known to the outside world. In ancient philosophy it was held to be the tomb in which the personality was enclosed. In Hebrew psychology body and soul were much more closely associated with each other: the heart could think and the blood could cry out. In the New Testament they are obviously part and parcel of the same entity. Normally body and soul were believed to mature and decay together. In

1. Best, *Unity of Church and Body of Christ* (S.P.C.K.), 1956, *passim*.



the case of Christians, however, the spirit was renewed by partaking of Christ: it developed a new spiritual body which rose to perfection as the physical body was sloughed off at death. If that was the psychology behind the notion of human personality, we can see what St Paul meant by describing the Church as the body of Christ. It was the instrument of his personality, the means of his self-expression, the outward organism of which the inner life was Christ himself. But in its inner reality it is comparable with the spiritual body, the body of the resurrection rather than the material, ponderable body of everyday life.

It is not a very hazardous conclusion to draw, and may even be regarded as inescapable, that the Church is intended to be, and actually is, an anticipation of heaven here upon earth. Two practical facts militate against such a conclusion. The one is that we have an endemic disposition to regard heaven as a remote place and are offended by any suggestion that it can be closely associated with anything that is so coarse and vulgar as the world we know. The other is that the Church as we actually know it contains so many unworthy elements and is so far from perfection that to connect it at all closely with heaven would inevitably degrade our idea of the ultimate state of bliss.

Against these objections however we have to set the fact that the very idea of an Incarnation implies a close connexion between heaven and earth. That relationship, established at a particular moment in time, would not have been possible if there had not been already some inherent compatibility between God and his world. That compatibility we may see arising out of the actual creation of the world by God. There is a natural affinity between an author and his work. So there is between the world and its Maker. The relation is even closer in the latter case, for God did not create the world and then leave it to run alone. His power still pervades it: he is not only its maker but also its sustainer: it is still in him that we live and move and have our being. There is a natural association then between heaven and earth; and that is why an Incarnation was possible.

It is true that this connexion has been almost severed by man's sin. We are, in virtue of our very birth into this alienated world,

'very far gone from original righteousness'. That no doubt is why it is so easy for us to think of heaven as excessively remote. But the Incarnate Lord, having reunited heaven and earth in his own person, took pains to assure his followers that heaven was not far from every one of them. This was not easy to do because, as Jews, they had learnt to hold a deistic view of God, thinking of him as infinitely remote and in contact with earth only through a host of angels and other intermediaries. But Jesus broke this down not only by his own appearance on earth but also by his teaching of the imminence, and indeed presence, of the Kingdom of Heaven. This was at any rate the first step to the realization of heaven here upon earth.

Consequently, when Jesus sent out the Twelve it was with express instructions to proclaim the advent of the Kingdom, and so to close the gap between earth and heaven. The healing they were empowered to do was a sign of the Kingdom. The victory they were to gain over the demonic powers of evil was evidence of the destruction of the kingdom of Satan. The 'strong man armed' had been defeated: the Stronger was already taking possession. This attitude of mind was reinforced by the guarantee Jesus gave to the apostles about their management of affairs: 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.' It was an assurance that, under the terms of the new covenant, what they arranged for the conduct of the Christian community should have the backing of heaven and be completely authoritative. The close association between the other world and this comes out, as one might expect, in Jesus's discourse on his last night on earth: 'I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom.'

It is significant that the Twelve had no hesitation about acting in this spirit when they succeeded to the management of affairs. There is the unforgettable phrase in the letter from the first council of Jerusalem as described in Acts 15: 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'. From the same source St Paul drew his confidence in giving a ruling even when he had admittedly no direct command from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> To this evidence we may add the fact that the age of miracles was succeeded by the age

1. 1 Cor. 7:12. 'To the rest say I, not the Lord.'



of sacraments. The sacraments are the continuation of the miracles of the gospel. Both alike are signs of the presence of the Kingdom. There was no wide gulf between heaven and earth for the apostolic Church.

Now all this is sometimes expressed by saying that the Church is 'the extension of the Incarnation'. It is a phrase to which objection is sometimes taken on the ground that it involves a certain derogation from the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. But it is difficult to see why. After all, no more is suggested than that it is an *extension* – no one would suggest that it is something fresh to stand opposite the original Incarnation. And unless we are ready to fall into the error of thinking that heaven and earth are irretrievably separated from each other, ought we not to recognize the biblical support given to the thought of their inter-connexion as suggested in the last paragraph?

Most clearly, of course, is the idea of the propinquity of heaven and earth brought out by St Paul's figure, which we have already discussed, 'the Body of Christ'. As the human body is the instrument of the personality, so is the Church the instrument of the personality of Christ. If it is suggested that the Church is at best an unworthy instrument, that may be readily conceded. But so of course was the physical body of Jesus. It allowed him to feel weariness and pain, it hungered and thirsted, it was even subject to death: was that a worthy instrument for the use of the eternal Logos? Apparently it was. At any rate it was only by the use of such a body that the nature of the Eternal could be made clear to human beings. It was in *that* face that the glory of God was reflected. May we not believe then that it is through our kind of Church, with all its imperfections, even including the fact that its members are sinful men, that God needs to carry on the work of his Son? If the Church were some gigantic, powerful, efficient, Juggernaut of a society, should we not be crushed beneath it and recognize it as something so far removed from our ordinary human nature that it could not possibly be the proper instrument for the redemption of mankind? To work out the present imperfections of the Church on earth and to make it an ever more handy tool for the Master's use is part of our discipline in this temporal life.

We can then at least recognize that a workman's tools are an extension of his personality. They are the means by which he expresses himself in the objective world. So the Church is the extension of the Incarnation inasmuch as it is the means by which Christ expresses himself in the world of today. But this leads to another thought. It is the spirit of the workman that guides his tools, his spirit that evolves the design and produces the vitality to execute it. Without too great a straining of poetic licence we may say that the spirit of the skilful workman lives in his tools.

It is no mere analogy, but a piece of reality, to say that the Spirit of Christ lives in the Church. In the life of the Blessed Trinity the Spirit is no mere quality or function of a whole Personality; he is himself personal, the Third Person in the Godhead. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, is animated by his Spirit. The Apostles waited on the day of Pentecost for the manifest descent of the Spirit upon them before they could start off as an organized body on the work Christ had given them to do. It is for this reason that this day is often regarded as the birthday of the Church. Dr Flew thinks that the honour of being designated as the birthday should be given to the date of the Last Supper.<sup>1</sup> Others suggest the day of the Lord's baptism, while still others remind us of the earlier existence of the Jewish Church in whose womb the Christian Church was born. But the tradition is strong that regards the first Whitsunday as the birthday of the specifically Christian Church. And that is because of its association with the gift of the Spirit. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and enabled them for the work of the new Messianic community.

This does not mean that the Spirit was wholly associated with the Church or that this was the only date on which he was given. The writer of the Fourth Gospel, at least, believed that the Spirit was at work even outside the limits of the ecclesiastical society, and he believed that the gifts of the Spirit could be given at other times, for instance in the evening of the Resurrection day. But if we take the New Testament narrative as a whole, it is clear that Pentecost saw the great public and official descent, so to speak,

1. Flew, *Jesus and his Church*, p. 105.



of the Spirit. The very prominence given to the narrative suggests that here a new start is being made. The wind and the fire and the 'speaking with tongues' were all signs of something marvellous: they marked a new start. Later the same gift was conveyed to others by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, and if there was no wind and no fire on those occasions, at least a kind of ecstasy that bears some relation to the 'speaking with tongues' was apparently experienced. Whatever it was, some phenomenon obvious to the recipient if not to bystanders did normally accompany the gift of the Spirit. 'Have you received the Spirit since you believed?' was a question that admitted a quite simple reply in the affirmative or negative. Indeed, one might almost believe that the really distinctive mark of the Christian was not belief in Christ, or even baptism, but possession of the Spirit.

How the possession of the Spirit made itself manifest after the first generation or two is not clear. But probably the external phenomenon of ecstasy, or 'speaking with tongues', merged into 'the Spirit's viewless way', hidden in the improved moral life and enhanced powers of the recipient. This decline into normality did not occur without arousing some dissatisfaction. An effort to revive the outward manifestations and to introduce a new period of the 'incarnation of the Spirit', parallel to but superseding the incarnation of the Logos, was made in the second century by Montanus and his prophetesses. They even induced their Spirit-filled followers to assemble at a little-known village in the heart of Phrygia to await the descent of the New Jerusalem. But that was short-lived, and Christians settled down to a recognition of the fact that the gifts of the Spirit are regularly shown in the normal life and work of the Church.

This recognition was of particular importance in the early years of the Church when the second coming of Christ was expected in the near or immediate future. The Fourth Gospel, as will be remembered, had claimed that the 'return' of Christ had in some sense already occurred in the illapse of the Holy Spirit, as well as in the sacraments. This may have been one reason why early Christians were so anxious to see evidence of the Spirit's presence, even if it was displayed in the normal 'fruits of the Spirit' rather than in any psychological abnormality. It would help to

satisfy the eschatological needs or longings for the end, that formed so marked a feature of early Christianity.

Nor would the church of that period have been very interested in our modern arguments whether the gifts of the Spirit are given in baptism or only in confirmation. Both the washing of regeneration and the laying-on of hands were part of the great ceremony of initiation, and it would seem obvious that normally the full gifts belonged to the completed ceremony. If indeed by exception the gifts were given without some part of the ceremony, then haste was made to repair the omission and complete the rite. In any case the gift of the Spirit was essential: the Spirit was the vital power of the whole body of believers.

The inner life of the Church then is Christ, and its vitality is his Spirit. The Church, however, is made up of human beings: its membership consists of a vast number of individuals. What is their relation to this inner life and vitality? St Paul gives a good deal of attention to this question. It must be confessed that what he says may seem mystical or merely pictorial to us. Actually he is by his very vigour asserting that there is more than metaphor in what he says. He tells us in effect that each member of the Church shares in the life and even the personality of Christ. Christ is a 'universal personality', fulfilled by all things in all ways, a *pleroma* or fullness that is able to comprehend without submerging other personalities. In him all things consist or hold together: <sup>1</sup> he is all and in all.

When we are baptized we are 'grafted into' Christ. Our personality is inserted into his in such a way that the two become part and parcel of each other, just as the twig and the trunk into which it is grafted become one tree, with the same sap, the same vital energy flowing through both. So close is this relationship that when we are baptized we recapitulate in ourselves the experiences of the Christ-life. We die with him to sin and rise again with him to righteousness. As we are lowered beneath the baptismal waters we seem to drown. In that moment we die to the old world, as Christ died to it on his cross. A moment after we rise to the fresh light of day and in that moment we rise from the

1. Col. 1:17. Cf. Col. 2:9-19, 3:11.



death of sin, as Jesus rose from the tomb, to a new life of righteousness. Concluding St Paul's parable for him, we might say that in the sunlight pouring upon the neophyte as he emerges from the waters we recognize the life-giving light of the Spirit which will illumine his path and fill him with vigour for the rest of his mortal life.

If we are inclined to think that this teaching is peculiarly Pauline, we should remember the Fourth Gospel and our Lord's saying to be found there, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, so neither can ye, except ye abide in me.'<sup>1</sup> This is not quite so relevant a metaphor, perhaps, since it deals with the consequences of dissociation from Christ rather than with grafting into him. Yet the connexion between a tree and its branches is the same in both cases and both imply an intensely ontological relation.

In fact they both suggest again that the really essential thing in Christianity is incorporation into Christ. No doubt this may involve psychological change and corresponding ceremonial rite or sacrament. But the really important end to which both conversion and sacrament are the means is our being 'made one' with Christ. This is the essence of what Schweitzer called 'Paul's Christ-mysticism'.<sup>2</sup> Of course if we do not believe that any personality can ever be penetrated by another, that we are each 'cribb'd, cabin'd, and confin'd' within our own hermetically sealed cockpit, so that we can look out upon the clouds but cannot put out our hand and touch them, then this mysticism is the merest nonsense. But if we believe that there is possible a constant interplay between our personality and another's so that we can vitally affect each other's character and conduct, then we can understand why St Paul said that for the Christian everything must be done 'in Christ'. Whatever was apart from Christ had the nature of sin, but what was done 'in Christ' was a new creation with a new vigour, a new capacity, which lifted it out of the ruck of all common virtues. Even when, in the moral codes with which he likes to end his letters, he is enumerating Christian

1. John 15:4.

2. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, *passim*.

virtues, which would be recommended as genuine virtues even by his Pagan and Jewish contemporaries, he insists that they must be practised 'in Christ', and suggests that that will make all the difference. If husbands love their wives, and masters train their servants, 'in Christ', the respective relations will be infinitely higher and better and more stable than if the people concerned were members of the synagogue or of some mystery cult.

All this is possible because Christ is the life of the Church and his Spirit is its vital energy. Here is the heart and core of the whole matter. The Church is the Church because in it believers are put into direct relationship with Christ and because its members are incorporated into him. Such a claim is not capable of proof but it is capable of experience. It has been the assertion of millions in every age since the time when Jesus lived on earth. They claim that this relation to Christ is precisely what they themselves have felt and known.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *The Authority of the Church*

IT is clear that every society must exercise some authority over its members. Otherwise it would not be a society at all. A group in which there was no common deference to a central control would be a mere conglomeration of individuals without any unity to make it recognizable as a society. People band together for all sorts of reasons, for mutual aid, or for the pursuit of a common end, but they could not assist each other in the attainment of the desired purpose if there were no accepted authority to guide their efforts.

Among Christians it is almost universally recognized that the Church must possess and wield authority, though there are widely differing views as to the nature and extent of that authority. Whatever it is, it is not quite universally recognized, for there are some who think they can be Christians without belonging to any society, citizens without a city, who believe that religion is purely a matter between God and the individual. Not recognizing the right of the Church to exist, they obviously deny any claim on its part to authority.

Whatever can be said in favour of such a view, it is certainly not in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, and it is hard to reconcile with the history of Christian doctrine or with the dictates of commonsense. By the standards of both revelation and reason the authority of the Church is grounded in that of God himself. God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, obviously has a right to guide and instruct the creatures he has made. His word is the law in accordance with which the whole creation moves and by which we are redeemed to everlasting life. We are made familiar with its law through the operation of his Church. No society of human beings dare claim to stand adequately in the place of God or to wield worthily his authority. But the Church, in so far as it stands for his interests and in so far as it holds his commission, can and must claim at least some measure of veneration and obedience.

Historically we find this claim both made and recognized among the Jews. With them the Church and the nation were, in intention at least, identical. They were God's people and they were to bring a blessing to the whole world. When the bulk of the nation proved false to that ideal, they were recalled by the voice of the prophets, claiming to speak authoritatively in the name of Jehovah: 'Thus saith the Lord'. On the lines of the prophetic statements were drawn up successive versions of the Torah, the Law, by which the nation was to order its life and be kept fast in its allegiance to God. When the nation failed to maintain its faithfulness, it was schooled in adversity to recognize the value of God's guidance in its affairs. After the Exile, when nationhood had decayed, the ecclesiastical character of the chosen people stood out all the more clearly. Even when they failed as a whole to respond to their high calling, a 'remnant', claiming to be the true Israel within Israel, continued to demand a hearing for Jehovah and his law.

It was this remnant, not easily discernible, but revealing its vitality in the movement of John the Baptist, with which Jesus identified himself. He made it the New Israel, the nucleus of the Messianic Kingdom, his Church, against which he promised that the powers of hell itself should not prevail. Jesus was not sparing in the authority he conferred upon his Church. 'As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.' To be sent was the special characteristic of an apostle. Jesus called twelve, in whom his authority was specially vested. They were given the 'power of the keys' and the authority of 'binding and loosing'. The key was the symbol of the steward's office, and the picturesque statement implied that they had authority to guide the Church in both material and moral matters and that the decisions at which they arrived would be regarded by God as valid. Using a somewhat different metaphor but implying the same promise, Jesus told them that in his Kingdom they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In the new era they would be the leaders and saviours of their people as the Judges had been in the pre-monarchical times of the Old Testament.

It is significant of the literal way in which they interpreted their instructions that after the resurrection of Jesus the apostles



immediately proceeded to fill the vacancy in their ranks caused by the defection and death of Judas. They were soon faced with the gravest possible problems on which to exercise their authority. The greatest of all was the relation of the new Church to the old. Was Christianity to be an inner circle of Judaism? Was it to consist of Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah? Must every Gentile who wished to become a Christian first become a Jew and conform to the Jewish law? It can easily be imagined how strong must have been the pull to maintain the Church as a Jewish concern and how bitterly many must have resented the liberalism of Hellenists like Stephen and Philip, and then Paul. In spite of the opposition we can see from the account of the first Christian 'council' at Jerusalem in Acts 15 with what authority the leaders interpreted the mind of Christ in their dramatic situation. In effect they abandoned the Mosaic Law as an essential of the faith, released the infant Church from the swaddling bands of Judaism, and set it free to follow its own line of development.

Scarcely less striking, though of less vital significance, must have been the struggle over the observance of the weekly holy day. How the change from Saturday to Sunday came about we do not precisely know. But to many it must have seemed a flagrant breach of one of the ten commandments, and it was done on the authority of the Church. At first, no doubt, the Christians kept the seventh day side by side with their own commemoration of the Lord's resurrection on the first day. The special marking of the first day by the repetition of the Lord's Supper seems to us so natural as scarcely to call for comment. But at least it was one of those items of management for which the leaders felt they had sufficient responsibility. We know from the actions of St Paul and from indications in Acts and the Apocalypse how rapidly the observance of the Sunday grew. To allow it to replace the Saturday was a signal evidence of the Church's authority.

It is hardly surprising, though regrettable, that some modern Christians, like the Seventh Day Adventists, should prefer the authority of the commandment to that of the Church.

A third respect in which authority was shown has proved of fundamental importance in the development of Christian thought. This is nothing less than the consolidation of what is now known

as the 'Apostolic Tradition'. The term is employed to designate the general consensus of opinion about the life and teaching of Jesus that lies not merely behind our present gospels but behind the documents and oral traditions from which these gospels were composed. Almost superhuman efforts have been made by modern scholarship to penetrate through to the original teaching of our Lord and the original narratives in which his story was told. It was at one time somewhat naïvely thought that we could reach to a primary colourless narrative that would simply reveal 'what happened'. We are now convinced that even the earliest teachers had their own point of view and that their reminiscences were actually told in order to give expression to that point of view. The cycle of narratives, collection of parables, and recollections of Christ's teaching would all express and illustrate the received ideas about his person and mission. No doubt there were differences of individual interpretation, but very early there were well defined limits beyond which differences of interpretation would be regarded as outside the pale. It was the Church that decided what the limits were. The whole corpus of received teaching and narrative out of which our gospels grew was the Apostolic Tradition carrying the recognized, if ill defined, authority of the Church.

A fourth and most important element of Christian life that shows the extent of churchly authority is the Bible itself. Many Christians are so accustomed to emphasize the authority of the Bible that they are apt to forget how much of its authority the Bible owes to the Church. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, it was of course taken over from the Jewish Church and was given, so to speak, a fresh *imprimatur* in the Christian connexion. The Christian Church thus found that it had a sacred volume all ready to its hand. But it soon began to compile another for itself, though the task was not completed for several centuries. The letters of people like St Paul were for the most part written to individual congregations and were intended to be read publicly to the members. The fact that they were read in the course of the liturgy, when the Old Testament books were also read, would soon lead to the conferring upon them of a sacred character. This was enhanced by their accepted apostolic origin or



guarantee. There gradually grew up a corpus of writings that were believed to possess such inherent authority. It was believed that St Peter stood behind Mark and St Paul behind Luke. In any case the gospels were not just written in the void: the current view is that they were intended to have a place in the liturgy. They probably represent a series of lessons intended to be read in church.

Further, it must be noted that it was the authority of the Church that decided what books should be included in the corpus of scripture. There were a number of claimants like the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Epistle of Clement that long struggled for a place but were finally excluded, while there were others like the Apocalypse and II Peter that only secured their place after long opposition. Athanasius, in the fourth century, is the first father to give precisely our list of books, and it was not much later that the list was generally regarded as closed.<sup>1</sup> But it is not until the seventh century that we find the canon of the New Testament formally agreed by conciliar authority for the whole Church.<sup>2</sup> All through, it was the authority of the Church that decided which books were to be included and which not. It would be difficult for the authority of the Church to be more obviously expressed.

Granted that the Church is expected to exercise some authority over its members, the question arises what kind of authority is it to be? There are many different types, but they may be generally grouped under the three heads of military, magisterial, and maternal. The military type is that which demands instant, unquestioning obedience. The magisterial is that which expects obedience to some form of law already, nominally at least, accepted by the subject. The maternal is that which relies for obedience upon affection, understanding, and experience. Under this last we should also include the authority of the teacher.

It is tempting to think that, since God is the supreme authority and the Church derives from him, ecclesiastical authority should be of the most drastic and Draconian kind, the kind that has here

1. The Third Council of Carthage accepted it for North Africa in 397.

2. Quinisext Council (In Trullo) 691.

been described as military. But Jesus himself seems to have repudiated any such suggestion. He will have no enforced obedience. He wants his followers to be, not slaves or servants, but friends and sons of God. His aim is always to make his hearers stop and think things out for themselves. He seldom gives a plain answer to a plain question, and will often indeed leave a question hanging in the air. There is more than a superficial parallel between the methods of Jesus and of Socrates. The people said that he taught with authority, but not like the scribes. The scribes quoted their authorities *ad nauseam*: their knowledge was second or third hand. Jesus spoke not without knowledge of ancient precedent but out of the experience of a heart completely attuned to God. He taught authoritatively out of the depths of his own experience.

It is sometimes taken as a matter of course that, if God had intended to reveal himself, he would have done so openly in every detail in a manner that would leave no room for doubt. But that is by no means self-evident. If what we have just said about the method of Jesus is true, it is much more likely that God, so far from compelling our belief in him, would so arrange his self-revelation as to leave the decision of acceptance in our own hands. Indeed, the making of such a decision and the staking of our all upon it might very well be a most important element in the training of our character. What Jesus called for was faith, and faith is a moral action of the whole personality implying not only belief but trust. In other words, faith must always imply the possibility of doubt. Otherwise faith would be no longer faith but knowledge.

If the Church is the body of Christ, the instrument of his action here upon earth, then its authority must be of the same nature as that which he deliberately exercised in the days of his flesh. No doubt there are occasions when the Church must exercise the magisterial authority of any human society and administer discipline to its members even to the point of exclusion or excommunication. But such occasions will be the exceptions that test the rule. The normal authority of the Church will be of the maternal or pedagogic variety. It will rule by love and not by fear. It will not bludgeon us to silence, but will always demand



the greatest possible response on our part. It will expect us to make every effort to understand according to our ability. It will lay down principles rather than rules. It will always endeavour to elicit our willing consent and cooperation.

The reader will not have failed to notice that the description we have here given of ecclesiastical authority is specifically Anglican. The different branches of Christendom have each their own way of viewing authority and we should consider each of the more important in turn. But for the moment we can stick to the Anglican.

For Anglicans the organs of authority are three: the Bible, the Church, and human reason. To take the last first, everyone recognizes the place of reason. You may call it conscience, or private judgement, or what you will, but in the last resort every individual must surely in matters that concern his eternal salvation make his own decision for himself. The Anglican has the uncomfortable but salutary notion that he must exercise his reason, according to the measure of his ability, all along the line. He cannot make one initial act of faith in the Church and then leave the ecclesiastical organization to decide every remaining question for him.

He believes that he is helped by the maternal guidance of the Church. He knows that it is in and by the Church that the apostolic tradition has been handed down through the ages and has reached him even at his mother's knee. He knows that it is the Church's business to teach him the faith, and he believes that it has adequately summarized essential doctrine for him in the creeds and in the decisions of the four Ecumenical Councils. He believes that his own branch of the Church has given him further guidance, in the Articles and Catechism contained in the Book of Common Prayer. If he wants to know how these historical decisions are effectively brought up to date and applied to the questions that agitate the contemporary world, he can take notice of his diocesan or national synod or of the findings of the decennial Lambeth Conference. If he wants further help, advice, or moral assistance in his own private life he can always consult the local parson, who as his title implies is the *persona*, the

representative in his own parish of God and his Church. Here are varying degrees of authority, none of which claims infallibility. They will be aids to his reason, not substitutes for it.

Behind all this stands the Bible. Here is the foundation document of the Church, not in the sense that it preceded the Church – we know that it did not – but in the sense that it represents the standardization of the apostolic tradition, the tradition which the Church has itself recognized as authoritative. As such it contains everything necessary for everlasting salvation, and nothing can be taught as necessary to salvation that cannot be proved from the scriptures. The Bible is thus at once the private book of devotion for every Christian and the handbook for the mission of the Church. It is this book that the Church holds in her hand as she faces the world. As she is the authoritative guardian of saving truth, she can show here both her credentials and the guarantee of her teaching. The two together make an overwhelming appeal to the Anglican.

The views most nearly approximating to the Anglican are those of the Old Catholic and the Orthodox. Both would pay more deference to post-apostolic tradition and to three later General Councils than Anglicans are accustomed to do. In both also there is a greater veneration for dogma (that is authorized statement of doctrine duly formulated and promulgated), as such, so that neither the Bible nor human reason assumes quite the high relative importance that it has for the Anglican. Perhaps both are also a little more hampered, owing to the difficulty of gathering representatives of their whole body together, in deciding their attitude to current questions. Nevertheless there is strong basic agreement with recognized Anglican principles and a growing assimilation of common views.

The picture is very different when we turn to the many Protestant denominations. Although, as we have seen, the idea of the Church as a visible society is again assuming great importance among them their effective principle is still that of private judgement. The ease with which their members move from one denomination to another is sufficient to show that the idea of the visible Church as an essential unity has not yet taken any firm grip of the lay members. As many of these churches owe their



origin to the effort to reproduce the polity and the doctrine of the New Testament, it can naturally be expected that the Bible is not only the foremost common authority but almost the only one. The strenuous efforts once made to exercise pastoral and spiritual discipline have largely disappeared. Individual freedom and independence are the characteristic notes, and outside the Presbyterians there is not much left of the authority of the Church.

At the other extreme, of course, lies the Papal theory. Here when the individual has once by an act of private judgement submitted himself to the authority of the Church, he is expected to obey it without question. This is the nearest to a military notion of authority that we have in ecclesiastical affairs. The claim to absolute infallibility has a strong appeal to souls weary of struggle and longing for security. It also has an appeal to men of affairs who seek some compact expression of Christianity to combat materialist influence in art, literature, business, and politics. In recent years the system of authority has centred more and more in the Pope himself. The old popular argument 'Rome never changes' is now seldom heard. The Pope is in effect the living voice of the living God. The appeal is less to papal utterances of the past than to the current voice today. What he says will be an interpretation of the teaching of the Bible and of the Church; but what is really important is that it is *he* who says it, because it is only through his voice that we know what God means to say to the world of our own day. Whether or not this is original Christianity there can be little doubt that in the midst of the confusion and terror of today it makes a special appeal. However much we may regret the fact, it is not less but more authority for which people appear to be asking.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *The Genius of the Church*

WE must now begin to draw together our somewhat discursive description of the Church and ask ourselves what is its particular ethos and character. On any showing, it must be viewed in the light of God's revealed plan of salvation. It is his instrument in redemption. Although it includes members who have already passed from this life and even those who enjoy the bliss of heaven, as far as this world is concerned it is still the ark of salvation, the means by which those who are being saved are kept secure amidst the storms and troubles of everyday life and conveyed to the heaven of ultimate and unalloyed bliss.

This picture of the Church as a God-given means of protection in the midst of untold dangers is not the only aspect of the reality and perhaps not even the most necessary for us to visualize. Nevertheless it is of great importance and it demands further consideration. The cry for security has always been characteristic of humanity, but perhaps never more so than today. On the material side the development of the Welfare State, with its guaranteed care of the individual citizen from the cradle to the grave, is an indication of the way in which statesmen have tried to answer the cry. It can never, of course, be completely answered. The vagaries of nature, the unpredictability of sickness, the incidence of mortality all combine to defeat our hopes of certainty. And where man is most free from nature and appears to have his destiny in his own hands, he is perhaps the least stable. In spite of the sudden spate of inventive genius during the present epoch we feel in general less secure than we were before. We came near to destroying the finest flower of our civilization during two world wars in one generation; a third may complete the task, and leave us with scarcely a single fruit of ten thousand years of toil.

If the lack of security is so painfully felt on the material side of our nature, it is even more obvious on the spiritual side. As far back as history stretches we can detect the efforts of man to



set himself right with the powers that order the universe. In the Church of the Old Testament this was provided for in the covenant between Jehovah and Israel. They would worship him and recognize no other God, and he would give them every advantage and make them a blessing to their neighbours. To the privileges and responsibilities of their national treaty with God the individual citizen was introduced by the rite of circumcision, and thus felt himself safe.

In the pagan world the same need for security was specially felt in the face of mortality. The need for some guarantee of a life beyond the grave was met by the mystery cults, in which the constant rebirth of nature was represented by the death and restoration of some ritual god; and the worshipper, ceremoniously united with him, was guaranteed a new birth to everlasting life.

Jesus recognized the fear in every heart and offered the remedy in his gracious invitation, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'<sup>1</sup> The Church, carrying on his work, offered itself as a refuge for the oppressed, the timid, the weak. It did not guarantee them relief in their material conditions. Indeed, as the times of persecution were soon to show, they might have to face torture and martyrdom for their new faith. But it did offer to lift them into a condition of confidence and serenity where the storms of ill-fortune could not touch them, where a Roman matron and her slave could face torture together with equanimity and where a bishop could refuse to be bought off from the wild beasts awaiting him in the arena.

That is why from the very beginning the Church had to be so careful to preserve its own identity and purity. If it was to be an ark of salvation, it must beware of false teachers and schismatics. A life-boat is not serviceable if it is riddled with leaks and its gear half gone. This explains too the seemingly arrogant claim that there was no salvation except in the Church. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. What it means, of course, is that there was no guarantee of safety outside the Church. Certainly there can be no security for the man who has thrown himself overboard

1. Matt. 11:28, 29.

or refuses to be drawn in when a line has been thrown out to him. Or to change the metaphor, if there are killer dogs about, the sheep are only safe when they are in the fold. Once grant the divine commission of the Church, then this claim is seen to be not arrogance but the merest commonsense.

It must be emphasized, however, that the salvation thus offered is no mere mechanical operation. There is no guarantee that, because one has once made an act of commitment, the rest will follow automatically. Continued cooperation is necessary; and we are continually called upon to make fresh acts of faith. What we are involved in is a life and not a mere legal contract.

In this connexion it is worth remembering that in human affairs the most we can ask for is *moral* certainty, not the security of a mathematical demonstration. This is sometimes forgotten by those whose desire for safety leads them to expect infallibility. Particularly in periods of great confusion and chaos, when every question is treated as an open question, those who are weary of the continuous struggle look round for some assurance which by its very nature will always give the right answer without room for doubt. As schoolboys we used to be taught that the ancients of Greece and Rome thought they had such an infallible guide in the Delphic Oracle, but since the oracles generally gave their pronouncements in ambiguous verse they were not of much practical value.

Today Christians who look for the security of an infallible guide are apt to find it in various, not to say contrasted, places: some in the Bible, some in the Church, some in the Councils, some in the Papacy, and some in what they know as conscience. It would be wearisome, and perhaps beyond our scope, to show how little support there is in reason or fact for any one of those identifications. We may however notice that the Bible itself, so far from speaking always with the same mind, often shows a variety of different approaches to the same questions. The Church, as is now generally agreed, shows both variety and development. The Councils are themselves subject to the judgement of the Church, and there is no common decision which are of universal obligation, Anglicans accepting only four, while Romans and Orthodox accept seven. The Papacy claims infallibility for itself, but as it



is not clear that the Pope has ever made an 'infallible' declaration since the promulgation of the decree of 1870, the point is at present of hardly more than academic importance. Of the individual conscience we need say no more than that its vagaries are notorious. We may feel bound to obey our conscience, but that is very far from making it an infallible guide.

The basic mistake in this search for infallibility lies in a fundamental misunderstanding of God's manner of revealing himself to men. As we have already seen, we have no right to assume that if God intended to make himself known he would do it in such a way that there would be no possibility of a mistake about it. He revealed himself in Jesus, but that was by no means universally obvious. 'He came to his own', we are told, 'and his own received him not.'<sup>1</sup> Always there is sufficient indication of the truth for men who are prepared to make an act of trust, but always at the same time there is room for doubt and even for denial on the part of those who have no real faith. As Jeremiah saw at a painful moment, it may even be part of our training that on occasion we shall be allowed in all good faith to make a mistake.

In any case what Jesus reveals of his Father's will is made known to us by way of principles rather than detailed rules. It is sometimes said that Jesus never did lay down any specific rules except in the one solitary case of divorce. In fact the making of detailed regulations is so contrary to his usual custom that the genuineness of this single exception has been questioned precisely on that ground. However that may be, it is certain that the aim of Jesus as a teacher was to inculcate principles and to encourage his disciples to draw their own conclusions in particular cases. In doing so they are not acting alone, nor do they rely merely on their own innate powers. Jesus promised the gift of his Spirit to 'guide them into all truth'.

From this we can deduce the kind of guidance properly to be expected of the Church. Her object is not to reduce her members to the condition of automatically obedient robots, but to train them to be men. They cannot be fully men unless they develop

1. John 1:11; 'He came to his own house, and his own people received him not' (Revised Standard Version).

in reliance on the Holy Spirit their innate powers, and they cannot develop those powers unless they have adequate opportunity to exercise them. For such exercise a certain amount of independence is essential. They must acquire a faculty of critical judgement and they must be prepared to back their judgement. Thus they can learn to answer their own questions and form their own private rules within the wide custom of the Church.

The Church can state revealed principles and give advice on their translation into action. She does not silence questions but, like her Master, points the way along which a solution can be found. She knows that illumination, when it comes, will be derived from the Spirit, just as power to effective action will be found only *in Christ*. It is not her privilege to guarantee conviction: she can only prepare the way for it. Thus her particular genius shows itself in assisting the characteristic contact of Christ with the soul. She is at once a school for sinners and a university for saints.

It follows that the genius of the Church will be manifest not only in its moral certainty as teacher and guide but also in the character it displays and inculcates. What precisely that character is may not be easy for us to distinguish. We live in a world that has been largely influenced by Christian ideas, while the Church itself has suffered from the infiltration of the world. Thus Church and world have grown into each other. The Christian in our western civilization cannot as a rule be immediately distinguished from the non-Christian. On the other hand, in parts of the world where Christianity has only recently made its advance into a purely pagan environment we are assured that the distinction is quite easy: it is possible to tell almost at a glance the Christian from his heathen neighbour.<sup>1</sup> Even in our mixed western society most people think they can make the same discrimination between the genuine Christian and the nominal one after only a slight acquaintance. At least, without attempting to analyse it, they seem to know instinctively the contrast between what is truly 'Christian' in character and what is not. There is in

1. This has been asserted to me on the spot by missionaries among the Papuans in New Guinea.



fact no higher praise that can be given to any departed member of modern society than to say, 'He was a real Christian.'

If we confess the difficulty of defining the Christian genius by the pragmatic test of its achievements in the building up of individual character, we can at least offer some suggestions as to its intentions. Here as usual we are helped by St Paul, who in this instance gives us an analysis of what he calls 'fruit of the Spirit'.<sup>1</sup> The turn of phrase is important, for it shows that the Christian character is not expected to consist of a number of virtues painfully acquired *ab extra*, but growing naturally from within as the result of the life of Christ and the energy of his Spirit at the heart and core of the individual personality. The list of characteristics mentioned consists of the 'fruits' grown from the seed planted in the soul at baptism and conversion, nourished by feeding upon the Body and Blood of Christ, exercised in all godliness of living, and brought to maturity in the atmosphere of the presence of God with whom the Christian dwells even now in the 'heavenly sphere'.

The list is well worth the most careful examination, but as it is a little long for our purpose, we will put in its place suggestions of necessary Christian virtues that St Paul makes in two other passages of his epistles. The first is the well-known Chapter 13 of I Corinthians, where in his hymn to love he explains that though there are three outstanding Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love, the greatest of them is love. The other is the short blessing in Romans 15:13, 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Ghost.' It will be noticed that we have here two pairs of characteristics joined by a fifth single one. We have faith and love on the one side, peace and joy on the other; the link between them is hope, which occurs in both lists.

It may well be that hope has this particular position because of its commanding importance in the Christian psychology of the first century. It is not simply that the whole period was characterized as afflicted by a 'failure of nerve', that is, with fear of death and of the 'unknown beyond' as its main symptom, and that therefore any stabilizing influence would be accounted as

1. Gal. 5:22, 23.

the greatest good. A more potent reason for the original emphasis on hope was the condition of crisis in which it found itself and which was indeed inherent in its whole theology.

Primitive Christians were people for whom thoughts of eschatology, reasoning about the end, loomed much larger than they do for us today. They were indeed people upon whom, as they said themselves, the ends of the world were come. Their fellow-countrymen had always looked upon the Messianic Kingdom as the end of one age and the beginning of another. And now that Kingdom had come: they were living in it. This did not mean however that the old age had passed away. It still persisted, but the new age had come and was, so to speak, riding over it. For a time the two would continue together, for how long no one knew, but it was expected that the time would be short. At least the old was destined to disappear and the new to survive until Christ should come again and usher in still another age, the 'world without end'. Of the success of the new age an earnest and guarantee had already been given in the resurrection and ascension of Christ: of the decline of the old world a symbol was to be seen in the fall of Jerusalem, which was no doubt expected long before it actually happened.

It can easily be seen how distinctive in such circumstances would be the genius of a society that placed in the forefront of its teaching the virtue of hope. When all around it men's hearts were failing them for fear, it would be the one supreme example of confidence. Men would rally to it as the sailors rallied to St Paul in the terror of the storm at sea. That confidence the Church has never lost. From very early days hope has been symbolized in Christian art by the figure of an anchor. Always that anchor has been cast 'within the veil' of the future, and the church has never dragged its anchor yet. That is why in every time of crisis it is still a rallying point, and still provides an element of stability in the midst of doubt and confusion.

This Christian characteristic of hope does not arise from any easy utopianism. Indeed, the Church's profound pessimism with regard to human nature is, as it has always been, a stumbling-block to the world. The doctrine of original sin at least involves recognition of a universal taint and disability in mankind. Man



is prone to sin, and is consequently born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward. That is why the old world, the present age, must be destroyed. To wrench one's mind from such a contemplation of deserved disaster and to assert an unconquerable assurance of ultimate salvation requires an effort of the whole personality that can only be justified by the acceptance of the good news announced by Christ. And to believe that one is already, in spite of appearances to the contrary, living in the new age requires a special illumination of the Spirit.

That is what the Church's hope means. It has nothing to do with the 'forlorn hope' beloved by romantic artists and novelists. It is no counsel of despair. It is a living, active, energizing spirit. It is the quality of aspiration, as it is represented by the great period of Gothic art with its spires pointing to heaven. It is a recognition that life is real and earnest. It incorporates a seriousness into our thoughts of the present because it recognizes the certainty of judgement. But because it also embraces the promises of God, it faces all the issues of life and death with serene and assured confidence.

Having thus viewed the leading character, stamped upon the genius of the Church from the outset, we are in a better position to take a quick glance at the other virtues we have mentioned. The first pair, faith and love, both have a close connexion with hope. The Epistle to the Hebrews actually defines faith as 'the conviction of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen' (II:1), and uses as a typical example Abraham who launched out into the unknown, confident that God would not fail to fulfil his promises. Faith is therefore the staunchest loyalty to God, whom we cannot see but whom we yet trust and love. It tears apart the veil of material things and enables us to live 'as seeing him who is invisible'. It is the very breath of life to the good man: 'the just shall live by faith.' It is the direct denial that only 'seeing' is 'believing'. It regards the whole universe as one vast sacrament, the garment that conceals and yet reveals the form of God. It transforms the world in which we live and enables us to breathe the air of heaven while we walk the pavements of our native town.

Love is the expression in action of faith and hope. It results

from the loyalty one owes to one's creator and from the conviction that his promises will be fulfilled. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.'<sup>1</sup> It has never been better described than in St Paul's famous prose poem (1 Cor. 13):<sup>2</sup>

Supposing I could speak in ecstasy with the languages of all the different races of men and even with those of the different orders of angels, all my words would be as empty of meaning as beaten brass or clanging cymbals, if I did not possess the gift of love. Even though I were a prophet and could penetrate every mystery and was versed in every sphere of knowledge, and though I had all faith so that I could remove mountains, and had not love, I should be nothing. And even if I doled out all my possessions in gifts of food, or flung myself on a fire in self-immolation, and had not love, I should be in no way benefited. Love is patient; love is kind; love makes no parade, refrains from boasting, never lacks courtesy, never pursues its own selfish interest, never shows bitterness or resentment, never takes pleasure in wickedness but only in the truth. Love keeps its own counsel, shows a ready trust, is full of hope and sturdy perseverance.

It will be noticed that in this panegyric comparatively little is said about the actual nature of love (vv. 4-7) but what is said on that head is enclosed in a framework which at the beginning (vv. 1-3) establishes the supremacy of love above every other virtue and at the end (vv. 8-13, which we have not quoted) claims that it is the one virtue that 'knows no limit to its endurance' but 'can outlast anything'.<sup>3</sup>

We ourselves have already defined love in the Christian sense as the determined effort to bring to pass the highest good of all with whom we come in contact. As such it is no mere sentiment, but a driving force derived from the Christ within and impelling us to imitate his example in revealing by his own conduct God's magnanimous friendship for man. This has not merely been the supreme rule of life for the individual Christian, taking precedence of all others, but it has been the main feature of the Church's genius all down the centuries. Even the Jewish Church believed that it had been called by God to be a blessing to all the

1. I John 4:10.

2. Wand, *New Testament Letters*, p. 45-6.

3. Phillips, *New Testament in Modern English*, p. 344.



nations, and though from time to time it felt driven to pursue an exclusivist policy through the need to keep the national blood and the national religion pure, it did under its best leaders establish an ideal of responsibility of one nation for another which never entirely died out. The Christian Church, which was almost from the first an international society, shouldered this responsibility herself and proclaimed the rule of love among all the nations. She prayed even for the persecuting emperors and encouraged works of charity, wherever she found the need.

It is true that there have been passages in the history of the Church when, to our modern notions, this boasted charity does not seem to have been conspicuously displayed. Even within the New Testament we find the Apocalypse revealing no very forgiving spirit to Rome 'drunk with the blood of the saints'. In later times we remember the persecution of the Waldenses, the wars of religion, the fires of Smithfield, the Inquisition. It is easy enough to bring up instances in which the paramount duty of love seems to have been forgotten. But we shall find it more difficult to be cynical, if we remember how we ourselves have become involved in two world wars during our own generation. There is this at least to be said: that when the Church itself encouraged or allowed force to be used on its behalf it was always endeavouring to secure the *highest* good of those who suffered at its hand. To many it seemed better to inflict bodily suffering if thereby the soul could be saved. One supposes that most schoolmasters, when they inflict corporal punishment, do so in the hope that they may thereby save the character of their pupils. Even St Augustine when he yielded at last and most unwillingly to the use of force against the Donatists fell back upon the text, 'Compel them to come in.'<sup>1</sup>

This exception apart, it must be admitted that the Church all down the ages has given the best example history has yet shown of self-denying service to humanity. Christians have had in view both the temporal and eternal welfare of those with whom they have had to do. Their home missions to the poor and unfortunate in civilized society, as well as their missions to the heathen, have set an example which secular society has taken centuries to

1. From the parable of the Great Supper, Luke 14:23.

appreciate and to follow. In their facing of utter poverty at home and of ruthless torture abroad the leaders in these works of mercy have provided material for some of the most inspiring pages of biography known to the literature of the world.

If hope is the culmination of the outward-looking virtues of love and faith, it is the source of the inward qualities of joy and peace. It is significant that love, joy, peace are given priority among the fruits of the Spirit. As the Spirit of Christ works in us to flow out in love to others, we lose the restlessness and discontent that arise from too great a concentration on the self, and find a serenity that glows into a quiet but conscious happiness.

The peace of the Church is something quite different from the apathy or indifference of Stoicism. It arises not from a disregard or neglect of the pains either of oneself or of others. It recognizes and accepts all the pains and penalties of the human lot, but has so supreme a confidence in the benevolent working of Providence that it has no undue anxiety about the issue. Pains to which you know there will be a happy ending are much easier to bear with equanimity than those whose issue is uncertain. So the Christian who believes in God's good ordering of the universe enjoys even in his own private life a peace that 'passes all understanding'.

Again, it would be easy for the cynic to point out that, however calm a disposition may be the privilege of the individual Christian, the Church as a whole does not seem to have been particularly successful in maintaining peace within its own borders. It is in fact notorious that the divisions within the Church are still one of the greatest scandals of Christian history. We have already dealt with this point elsewhere and have no intention of covering the ground again. But we may be permitted to remind ourselves that the present century is witnessing a great and determined effort to heal the breaches, and that even where from the most conscientious motives the effort proves unavailing, Christians are still for the most part ready to reckon themselves as members of the same family and to cooperate with each other wherever possible. The better the Church is able to establish and maintain peace and unity within its own borders, the more effective will be its continual plea for peace among the nations.



Finally, the serenity in the heart of the Christian leads to an inner happiness that is quite different from the pleasure-seeking that characterizes the man of the world. This happiness does not come as the result of any direct seeking but as a by-product of the cultivation of those qualities we have already considered. If we have hope, faith, love, peace, it would indeed be odd if we were not happy. It is true that the happiness may be sometimes unconscious. But we are surely happy if it does not occur to us to ask ourselves if we are happy, just as our health is probably good if we do not have to stop and ask ourselves if we feel well.

It is not suggested that such quiet, unnoticed happiness completely satisfies the meaning of the term 'joy' as used in every context of the scriptures. It is sometimes a more intense thing altogether, including happiness as the greater includes the less. It has in those passages what is called an 'eschatological' significance: it belongs to the expectation of the end: it is applied both to the exultation of heaven and to the fellowship of the early church in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> It is, in its Messianic context, a public, a common emotion. Christ is coming on the clouds of heaven: his people flock out with joy to meet him. The public joy echoes in the individual heart, as in the case of Elizabeth when the babe 'leaped in her womb for joy.'<sup>2</sup> So we are brought back to the condition of the Church with which we began. We are those upon whom the ends of the world are come. We are on the tip-toe of expectation: we have the excited happiness of children at a party, crying out 'What next?'

This joy is obviously part of the genius of the Church. There have no doubt been periods when she has been accused of melancholy or even of being a kill-joy. But then it is necessary to ask what kind of joy she is alleged to have killed. Certainly she has never been melancholy when she has remembered her true character. Actually she has down the ages provided the most soundly based happiness human nature has ever experienced. Her festivals have been the ground of most public rejoicing even to the point of being abused. It is from her inspiration that much of what gives lasting pleasure in literature and the arts has sprung. There is a depth, a seriousness, a meaning in what derives from

1. Rev. 19:7. Acts 2:46.

2. Luke 1:44.

her that makes the rest seem in comparison but froth and bubble. The knowledge that her Lord is coming already throws the glow of a rising sun over the most tentative efforts made in her name. Of the resultant joy every communicant is reminded as often as in the Eucharist he 'shows forth the Lord's death till he come.'



## PART FOUR

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### Some Special Questions





## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *The Relation of the Church to History*

IT is clear that, if the claims we have made on behalf of the Church are in substance true, it is itself much more than an ordinary event. It occurs in time but it belongs to eternity. It exhibits all the weaknesses of a temporal society, but its persistence and its success suggest a supra-temporal influence. It is at the point of intersection where the vertical line from heaven crosses the horizontal line of earth. Like the glory-song that heralded its Founder's birth at Bethlehem, its praises sound from the courts beyond the skies but are echoed among the hills and valleys of this lower world. It spans the ages and bridges the gulf between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. It is something for which history waited and within which it is now being fulfilled. As such an event the Church is unique. 'Prophets and Kings have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them.'<sup>1</sup>

From this it follows that one cannot deal with the story of the Church solely along the lines of secular history. It is true that Church historians in these days normally write their books as if they were dealing with a particular type of political history. But that is because we are schooled to search always for natural causes and not to summon some *deus ex machina* to explain historical events. At the same time, the Church historian has failed in his task if he has not allowed it to be seen that all through the natural development 'standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.'

It might of course be pointed out that even the secular historian cannot adequately perform his task without some analogous recognition. History is not just a chronicle of unrelated happenings: it is a record of the course of events. There cannot be a course

1. Luke 10:24.

without some sort of continuum, something to ensure a connexion in the long train of circumstance. The skill of the historian will be largely shown in his ability to trace this continuum. It is bound to be a selective process, and it is therefore bound to be also not merely a chronicle but an interpretation. This is what gives its variety and fascination to the writing of history, not only the discovering of the facts as they happened but the interpretation of their relation to other facts in the series.

In spite of the tremendous resources available today for the scientific historian, some who ply the craft are exceedingly pessimistic as to the possibility of ever finding out with complete certitude exactly what did happen. Others are even more pessimistic about the possibility of tracing cause and effect between the facts when they have been discovered. Both pessimisms are generally misplaced. It is no doubt true that one cannot have the same demonstrable certainty in history as one can have in mathematics. But history deals in the last resort with persons: the events or the facts which are its special material are due to human action. And personality is not susceptible of the same accuracy of measurement as is required by the mathematical sciences. One can however have a practical or moral certainty; and, if there is any truth in Butler's axiom that probability is the guide of life, that should form a sufficient incentive for historical enquiry.

Probably most historians would agree that within a limited field it is possible to see some inter-relation between events, and that on a short-term view it is even possible to trace some plan in human affairs. What arouses a measure of disagreement is the question whether it is possible to trace any overall plan in history as a whole. H.A.L. Fisher's outspoken announcement in his *History of Europe* that he could see no one meaning or purpose revealing itself in history has found an echo in the minds of many younger writers, who would deny their colleagues the right even to look for such an overall plan and would regard the search for it as a betrayal of the historian's proper task.

But that is surely to carry scientific prejudice much too far. If, as is generally agreed, interpretation is an essential part of the historian's task, why should it be confined to a restricted field?



Why should the cinema be legitimate and cinemascope illegitimate? It may be more difficult for the secular historian to trace the wider plan and to justify his conception of it, but that should make the effort more worth while. It would be valuable to know whether the stream that washed the shores of one's own country flows also round the world.

The ancients at least, as soon as they began to think about these things, had no hesitation in taking the larger view. The Stoics thought that the flow of events proceeded in circles, everything returning to the point from which it started. Although this cyclic view of history is regarded as hardly deserving the name of history at all, it was revived in our time by Spengler, who in his *Decline of the West* taught that civilizations regularly and inevitably proceed from barbarism to a peak of culture and power, and then having reached the zenith begin to decline to the point from which they started. The Jews with their idea of a progress to the Messianic Kingdom were probably the first to introduce the notion of history as advance in a straight, or possibly devious, line from point to point. Christianity enlarged this view to include all mankind in a journey towards a culminating point in a Day of Judgement which would involve the end of this temporal and spatial world and the beginning of a fresh state of existence. For a long period this view was taken mostly for granted. Early in the nineteenth century Hegel taught that history was a dialectical process between thesis and antithesis resulting in a synthesis, which in its turn became a new thesis to begin a fresh stage in the development. Marx used this formula to interpret the economic process, which he regarded as the one vital factor in history. In this sphere the dialectical conflict lies between capital and labour, and communism is the resultant synthesis. Since that involves a classless society, and since with such a society the *summum bonum* has been reached, presumably the emergence of true communism will be the end of history.

It is obvious that in all these instances there has had to be interpretation. The facts do not just leap out of their setting and present the observer with such theories. Something has had to be brought in from a larger field in order to explain them. It is only from what Freud called an 'oceanic' region that one can

bring coherence into the congeries of facts. The question is whether the ecclesiastical historian is in any worse plight than the secular in bringing his principle of explanation from outside the atomistic collection of disparate facts. Both alike have to deal with a universe of values, for it is only values that give meaning to facts, but the Christian claims that his values are not only universal but eternal. He looks upon the events of time from the point of view of eternity. He considers himself therefore able on *a priori* grounds to give a more comprehensive view of the meaning of history.

This does not imply of course a claim that the eternal or spiritual influence discerned by the Church historian in events can be proved by historical argument. All the ecclesiastical writer can do on that plane is to show that his interpretation is not inherently unreasonable and that in fact it provides a more satisfying explanation than any other hypothesis. We may be able to trace the history of the Church as we could trace that of any other society, but we shall have a far better understanding of it if we remember its claim to be the Body of Christ and the special instrument of the Holy Spirit.

We take it then that, so long as it is recognized that 'the eternal is not known by research but by faith', the ecclesiastical historian has at least as good a right to offer his sacred version of history as a soldier his military history, an economist his economic history, a sociologist his social history, a politician his political history. There is of course this difference, that whereas the rest, in view of their special but limited interest, will tend to be more selective in their choice of material, the sacred historian will be more inclusive as he sees all things working together for the fulfilment of God's plan. Even if he is restricted by his need to write of the Church as an institution, he will tend to think of the whole environment of world affairs as ministering to the development of the divine society. Just as Croce could think of history as the Story of Liberty and as others could think of it as finding its goal in liberalism, or communism, so the ecclesiastical historian will think of it as having its consummation in the Kingdom of God, of which the representative here and now is the Church.



Interesting examples of the way in which this can be done even by the secular historian have been given in our day by Toynbee and Butterfield.<sup>1</sup> The former sees history as a series of challenges to nations, the aim apparently being to develop a world-wide virtue. Nations that meet the pressure of untoward circumstance and respond to it successfully develop a higher type of character, while those which fail to meet it deteriorate and die away. Butterfield apparently sees the same challenge addressed not to the nation so much as to the individual. While Toynbee traces the fortunes of no fewer than twenty-two civilizations, seeking the cause of their rise and fall in this development of national character, Butterfield seems to think that all the vicissitudes of human life, whether due to natural or personal causes, are meant to test and train the individual. For both historians alike this world is a school for eternity. Neither will accept the view especially associated with the name of Herbert Spencer, which was common three quarters of a century ago, that progress is inevitable, that there is a force in nature itself that leads ultimately to perfection, and that without any conscious volition of mankind the race is bound to continue its upward course. Both Toynbee and Butterfield believe that man is closely concerned in the question of his own future and that without his willing cooperation neither the nation nor the individual can be saved.

There are in effect only two philosophies of history: the one that sees all events as occurring in a closed receptacle of space-time, and the other that sees them as the expression of influences that belong to a sphere outside the space-time continuum. It is the latter or sacramental view of history that is inevitable for the Christian. Events in the temporal sphere are the means by which eternal powers are known and experienced. The Church is the society in which earth is most obviously in contact with heaven. But the discerning eye should be able to see the hand of God in all secular events, though some will reveal it more clearly than others.

The task of constructing a *Heilsgeschichte*, or history of salvation, out of the events of secular history was first taken in hand by the Jews. The genius of their prophets was shown not so much

1. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Abridgement by D.C. Somervell). Butterfield, *Christianity and History*.

in a capacity to foretell the future as in their discernment of the way of God with men. They did not write history beforehand, although they did with remarkable accuracy forecast some future events. Their chief and epoch-making task was to take the events of their national history and to show how in them God was working out a plan both for them and for the whole world. In the beginning God created the world and placed man in it to enjoy it in fellowship with him. But man spoilt that fellowship by his wilfulness and consequently lost the paradise for which he had been made. God determined to win him back through the employment of chosen agents. They told how Jehovah called Abraham, the forefather of their race, and made an agreement with him. Abraham was expected to offer Jehovah faithful and exclusive service, and Jehovah in return promised to make Abraham and his descendants a blessing to all the world.

That is the beginning of the covenant relationship, with which we must deal again in our last chapter. The rest of the story is an account of the continued faithfulness of Jehovah and the repeated unfaithfulness of his people. When they proved recalcitrant, God had to deal with them severely as with delinquent children, but when they turned to him again he was always forgiving and ready to instruct them more fully in his ways. So in their first great calamity when they were under oppression in Egypt he rescued them in a wonderful way which was never to fade from the national memory. He gave them the Mosaic Law which should have taught them how to remain faithful to him. When however they inherited the promised land, they began to worship the local gods and to follow the debased morality of their new neighbours. As a result they fell into fresh troubles, from which they were delivered by the instrumentality of David who established for the first time a great Israelite Kingdom. By him and his son Solomon the temple at Jerusalem was built and for the first time there was a worthy centre of Jehovah-worship. In spite of this they again fell away and after renewed vicissitudes the flower of the nation was carried off to exile in Babylon.

Again Jehovah delivered his people. On their return they tried to live as a church-state but again proved unstable and fresh trouble followed. But in the midst of all these disappointments



the prophets taught the people to rely on the continued faithfulness of God and to rest in the assurance that the future was still in his hand and their destiny would still be fulfilled. Either a Messiah would come to restore to them the old kingdom of David, or their sufferings would avail to win happiness for others, or if all else failed, God would descend from heaven and put forth his own right hand to destroy their enemies and to establish a new heaven and earth. By whatever means the long-established covenant would certainly be fulfilled.

Such was history as interpreted by the prophets. They identified their nation with the church and made it unashamedly the centre of the whole process. However often they failed, the chosen people were still to be made a blessing for all the world, the means by which God would accomplish his beneficent purpose for mankind. The Jewish people as a race have never gone beyond that version. To them it is the whole of the story. For Christians however it is only the beginning, the first act of a drama in which the second was just about to begin.

The new event, the turning point of all history, occurred at the very moment when every apparent means had failed and when there was nothing left for the Jews but expectation. God himself then entered into the course of history in a new way, by the Incarnation of his eternal Word. Jesus of Nazareth, the Word incarnate, revealed in his personal life the character of the Godhead as translated into the terms of our mortal life. More than that, he announced the opening of the Kingdom of Heaven and offered new means of salvation to all who would enjoy it with him. He proclaimed the establishment of a new covenant, a new agreement between God and his people, and invited all and sundry to enter into it, not under the old terms of the Mosaic law but under a new law of the spirit, which had love as its guiding principle. He initiated his followers into this new relationship by the rite of baptism, and appointed twelve apostles to act as their leaders on his behalf. He also on the night before he gave his life for them attached a new significance to the meal he was accustomed to eat with them, describing the broken bread as his body and ratifying the new covenant in the wine, which he described as his blood.

This was the inauguration of a new age, a new stage in God's plan of salvation. The essentials of the Church were already there, and after the Lord's removal from this temporal scene and after the reception of the promised gift of his Spirit, his followers were not slow to interpret its meaning for all who would listen. St Paul saw it with especial clearness as the culmination of all history. As he himself belonged to both the Jewish and Gentile worlds and felt with particular poignancy the anguish of their mutual antagonism, it is perhaps natural that he should see in it the consummation of God's plan for the unification of mankind. God had worked the preliminary part of that plan through the Jews themselves. When they had proved unequal to the task, he had come himself in the person of his Son. Christ was a universal personality; in him Jew and Gentile met, the barrier between them was broken down. Anyone who now joined himself to Christ entered into this race of newly unified humanity. The Church was thus the home of both freedom and of unity. It was true that for the moment the Jews as a whole had refused the opportunity while the Gentiles were embracing it freely. But the admission of the Gentiles would certainly stir up the desire of the Jews. They presently would claim their own rights and mankind as a whole would be united in Christ.

It seemed right, and indeed necessary, to run over these interpretations of sacred history, for otherwise one would not reach any comprehension of what the Church really meant to those who were chiefly concerned in launching it upon the world. It is interesting to notice that just as members of the prophetic school were accustomed to summarize the chief events of their national history in order to show how God dealt with his people,<sup>1</sup> so the preachers and writers who built up the apostolic church gave similar summaries that led to the *dénouement* of that history as seen through Christian eyes.<sup>2</sup>

Almost at once it appears to have been perceived that the rhythm of salvation-history followed the same pattern in both eras. Before the Incarnation there was call, covenant, exile, church; so after the Incarnation there was the call to the New Israel, the new

1. See especially Pss. 135, 136, 105, 106.

2. See Acts 7.



covenant, the crucifixion, the Church. The events of the earlier history then became a type of the new. The Kingdom of David was a shadow of the Kingdom of Heaven; the Suffering Servant was fulfilled in the Messiah; the rescue from Egypt and Babylon was a foretaste of the ransom paid by Christ in delivering his people from their sins. This parallelism or typology often descended to details where the connexion is not immediately obvious: 'Out of Egypt have I called my son',<sup>1</sup> 'A bone of him shall not be broken'.<sup>2</sup> Yet the correspondence was very important to the Christians of apostolic times, for it gave them a telling argument in their effort to prove against the unbelieving Jews that the Church was in fact heir of the Old Testament and of the promises of God. The Church was the New Israel, and people of discernment might learn to understand that the new dispensation was made to follow the lines of the old precisely in order that no hint given in the old be left unjustified. Things happened 'in order that it might be fulfilled which was said by the Prophet . . .'

In one further respect there is a close agreement between the Old and New Testament notions of history: they both have a *terminus ad quem*. Both believe that as history had a beginning, so it will have an end. This end will involve a judgement, a discrimination between the morally bad and the morally good, and after it the bad will be destroyed and the good enjoy universal sovereignty. This view was reached as the climax of Old Testament thought: it is basic in the New. It is thoroughly endorsed by Christ himself. This does not mean that the end is to be reached along any steady line of indefeasible progress. Rather the future course of history is often viewed as a replica of the past – a series of cataclysms until one final world-shaking upheaval is reached which will usher in the end.

When the final Judgement will arrive we are not told. Jesus himself disclaimed any knowledge of the date. We are not even told whether it will be in time or in eternity; whether things will get better or worse before the end; whether the perfect society will be realized in space or in infinity. The doubt has been extended in our own day to the speculation of Jesus himself. When did *he* think he would reappear and establish the Kingdom?

1. Matt. 2:15.

2. John 19:36.

Schweitzer thinks that he expected it to happen immediately after his crucifixion. Dodd countered this by saying that he taught it as having happened already in the Incarnation. Bultmann refutes both the 'futurist' and 'realized' eschatologies by claiming that the Kingdom comes 'existentially' in the challenge of Christ to the individual conscience here and now. Cullmann explains that it was 'anticipated' in the resurrection of Christ but will be fulfilled only after a general judgement. Many of us will probably agree with Rudolf Otto that it did indeed begin at the Incarnation in the person of Christ as the day begins with the dawn, but that after much cloud and many storms it will only be fully revealed when Christ comes again in glory.<sup>1</sup>

When that second coming will occur, we simply do not know and have no right to ask. What is important is to realize that we now occupy the mean position. We live between the first and second comings of Christ. However prolonged the period may be it is still a time of crisis, of judgement. We are at one and the same time in the world that now is and in the world to come, that is to say, both in the present age and in the Kingdom. Here we are pilgrims but our true citizenship is in Heaven. This is what gives its special character to the Church. It functions in this world, but its real life is in the world to come. It draws its vitality and authority from above; and it makes us participants in both these gifts in order that we may be trained and equipped for the life beyond. This does not detract from the importance of the present world and secular society. Rather it gives them an added importance, since their 'glory' will pass away unless it is transmuted into a new glory that is derived from eternity. Thus the Church is to be seen as the one ultimately real society, into which all true history flows and where by a divine alchemy it is transmuted into the stuff of eternal life. It is the Church which, in virtue of its very position between time and eternity, is the true interpreter of the meaning and purpose of events.

1. Most of these views are summarized in Daniélou, *The Lord of History*, Chapter 8.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *The Origins of the Ministry*

It has often been noticed that in discussions on the reunion of the Church as they are conducted in this country the most intractable question is that of the ministry. Normally there is little difficulty about the creed: most of the negotiating churches are quite ready to accept both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. They are normally also quite ready, and sometimes even anxious, to find some way of combining their respective methods of worship. But then if the churches happen to be on opposite sides of the dividing line made by the Reformation, they are faced with the difficulty of sharing in each other's sacraments and particularly in Holy Communion. In the view of most, the Eucharist cannot be a valid sacrament without a valid ministry to celebrate it. Hence the devastating result of doubts about the ministry. There can be no common sacraments without a commonly accepted ministry.

The doubt felt about the ministry of the post-Reformation churches by the churches of the pre-Reformation tradition is due to the absence in the former case of episcopal ordination. As we have already seen, the Catholic or historic view is that ordination to the sacred ministry can be performed only by bishops. In this way it is believed an unbroken continuity is maintained with the primitive Church, with the Apostles, and with the divine Founder. It is of course a matter of mere observation that this has been the generally received view of Christendom until comparatively recent times. It was probably the universal view until the sixteenth century. Archbishop Wake<sup>1</sup> could go so far as to say, 'I know no government older than Calvin's time, but what was episcopal, in the Church of Christ.'

Since that time, however, the evangelical churches have for the most part dispensed with bishops, and have ordained their

1. Of Canterbury 1715-36.

ministers by other means, thus putting themselves obviously outside the merely mechanical continuity of the Church's history. Nevertheless in negotiating schemes for reunion many of them have shown themselves surprisingly ready to recognize the weight of historical argument and to arrange in the new united church that the continuity of the ministry through episcopal ordination should be restored and maintained.

However, those whose duty it is to lead the respective churches in such negotiations do not always find their task so easy. There are still many for whom the insistence upon episcopal ordination is a real stumbling-block if not an actual contradiction of the spiritual character of the Christian religion. Consequently, the bishops, who were originally intended to serve as a centre of unity for the Church, now too often appear as a barrier to reunion. Their existence in fact is a main element in that difference between Catholic and Evangelical which, as we have recognized, provides the main line of division in Christendom. It is therefore important to understand, if possible, how the bishops came into existence and formed so dominant a force in Christian history.

The trouble is that for the first century or so the evidence is not at all clear. Many scholars have hoped that some enlightenment on the confused question of the early ministry would be derived from the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls. But that much-advertised find is far from certain in the indications it gives of the ministerial arrangements within the Qumran community. Room is found for two Messiahs, a priestly and a kingly, with the former taking precedence. Similarly three priests share with twelve laymen the leadership of the community, with the main duty of setting an example of the ideals of public and personal conduct aimed at in the Law. It is interesting that in the New Testament the three who are regarded as 'pillars' are *within* the circle of the Twelve (Gal. 2:9), but the Qumran community still stuck to the hereditary priesthood of the old Israel, and put the Twelve outside the smaller body of Three.

Further, there seems to be a distinction between the 'overseer of the camp', who might conceivably correspond to the Christian bishop of a house-church, and the 'overseer of all the camps', who might correspond to the archbishop or bishop of a large



town with a number of churches. On the other hand it is not at all clear what was the function of the 'overseer'. He has a good deal to do with the examination and admission of applicants for entry into the community; he acts as judge in matters of discipline; no doubt he also must be versed in the Law; but sometimes he appears to be little more than a clerk of the works to whom a new entrant surrenders his tools, or a foreman to whom the workmen bring their complaints against each other.

Thus there is sufficient evidence of some kind of superintendence. Otherwise the most that can be said about the relation of these officers to the New Testament ministry is that they reflect the same determination to preserve unity and authority and the same lack of precision about the definition of functions. The evidence for the Christian ministry of the first century A.D. is nearly as obscure as that for the Qumran community in the first century B.C.

It is not that there is in the New Testament clear evidence of any other form of church government. The assumption sometimes made that *all* other forms are to be found in the New Testament period, that 'all have won prizes', is quite unwarranted. By the year A.D. 115 we have the fully attested episcopal system at work in Antioch. It would be easy to say that in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary we might conclude that this was the system in vogue from the beginning. Allowing for the qualifications necessitated by the gradual change-over from a missionary to a diocesan organization, that may very well have been the case. But if, instead of arguing backwards from 115, one tries to trace the progress from the beginning the task is much harder. That in fact is what the continental Reformers did in the sixteenth century and that is why they came to such diverse conclusions and broke into so many opposing sects. The most scientific way is surely to take the finished product, see what traces of it, if any, are to be found in the beginning, and then to decide whether it is a legitimate development or an altogether alien intrusion.

The simplest view is that the bishops succeeded the apostles, as the apostles had succeeded Christ. The difficulty is twofold, first that the bishops were stationary officials whereas the apostles

were mobile, and second that in the New Testament the term 'bishop' seems generally synonymous with 'presbyter' or 'elder'. There is indeed a prior difficulty that is raised somewhat paradoxically by a number of scholars: whether there was in the beginning any such thing as an 'apostleship' to delegate its authority in whole or in part, or whether the apostle's function was not purely personal. What we have in the earliest records as reproduced by St Mark and St Matthew is reference to the Twelve, who were apostles in the sense that they were sent on a special mission by Jesus just as the Sanhedrin sent out its plenipotentiaries. But if in the earliest documents apostleship appears as a mere function, already when St Luke wrote his gospel the Twelve appear as a solid body of officers. In Acts they are careful at first to keep up their number, and their office is seen to be that of the general oversight of the whole Church. Not that it was any part of their duty or intention to elaborate an organization. In view of the expected end of the world, their business was to gather as many people as they could into Christ's fold.

At first they used Jerusalem as their headquarters and let the Church spread where it would under the Spirit's guidance. It soon became clear that some organization was necessary. The Twelve again followed Sanhedrin precedent and appointed the Seven to assist them as junior officials. The primary duty of the Seven was to superintend the distribution of alms and to attend to the material needs of the Church. But we soon find them sharing in the task of evangelization, and travelling, like the Apostles, outside Jerusalem.

This appears to have been the headquarters organization, simple as it was. We know it was very flexible. St Peter, who was at first at its head, presently left it to share more actively in the expansion of the Church. He apparently took charge of the work among Jews while a new apostle and former persecutor, Paul, took the lead of the mission to the Gentiles. Thereupon Jerusalem seems to have settled into the position of what we should now know as a diocese, with James, a kinsman of Jesus, as the diocesan bishop. He, no doubt, would have a number of house-churches functioning as Christian synagogues under him. Here then we should have a conspicuous example, at the very centre,



of the way in which a nomad apostolate gives way to a stationary episcopate. It would no doubt provide an example for many town areas in Palestine and elsewhere around the Mediterranean seaboard.

But the example does not carry us very far. We have not yet considered how the local house-churches or Christian synagogues were individually administered. We have not a great deal of information, but what we have seems to suggest that here also Jewish precedent was closely followed. The Jewish synagogues were each controlled and administered by a body of elders, who may have begun as a selection from the men of riper years but rapidly became a board of officials. We know that it was Paul's custom, when building up the organization of the Church among his converts, to see that elders were appointed in every city.

There can be little doubt that the local congregations would be consulted about such appointments and the opinion of people with proved prophetic insight would be sought as to the suitability of the candidates. There is very little likelihood however that any local congregation would feel itself under an obligation to 'evolve and empower a ministry' for itself. In the only instances we know, all seems to have been done under the direction of the apostles or of some such 'apostolic man' as Timothy or Titus, who himself had been duly appointed by the laying on of hands. The two notes of authority and unity are clearly sounded in the New Testament, and whatever happened in the way of organization was assuredly under direct or indirect apostolic supervision. How important the authorized supervision was held to be we can judge already in A.D. 96, when the church in Rome writes to the church in Corinth to reprove it for some rough handling there of the duly appointed local ministers.

The question then arises, how did these town-churches acquire their bishops or supervisors as the apostles passed away? There is a strong tradition that the Apostle who lived longest after the death of Jesus, St John, settled down in Ephesus and performed the functions of a diocesan bishop there as James did in Jerusalem. It is highly probable that some of the 'apostolic men' or secondary apostles such as Timothy and Titus after their period of itinerant work took up lengthy residence in some centre

of their choice and performed there the same functions. That is what Titus himself seems to have done in Crete.<sup>1</sup> Such a person would have a number of house-churches under his general supervision, both in the town itself and in the adjacent country.

In the meantime, the house-churches were developing their own organization. As we have seen, each of these would have its own group of presbyters or elders. They would be assisted, as the numbers grew, by people with special gifts such as prophets, teachers, and healers, but they would themselves be responsible for the organization of the common life and worship. As we know from their seating accommodation and as would be inevitable at such a service as the Eucharist one of their number would act as presiding elder, but there is no evidence to show whether this was always the same person. If the apostle superintended the appointment of the presbyters, no doubt the choice of their president would also be under his guidance.

Somewhere between the apostle and the board of elders emerges the bishop. The title, *episcopos*, means overseer or superintendent. The view once current that it came into Christian usage from the title usually given to the steward of the pagan clubs has now been generally abandoned, since it is believed that the Christian ministry developed from Jewish precedents. It is more usual now to think that the word was synonymous with presbyter or elder, and simply emphasized the function of superintendence performed by the elders. There is however some doubt about this, and it can hardly be denied that it would more appropriately apply to the presiding elder. In a striking passage of I Peter (2:25) it is applied to Christ himself as the 'shepherd and bishop of souls' *par excellence*. In Numbers 4:16 it is applied in the singular to Eleazar who is given complete charge of the tabernacle. Similarly in I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:7 it is used in the singular, when the qualifications for the office are being enumerated. On the other hand the Philippian letter is addressed to the bishops and deacons in the plural. There of course the bishops might be the presiding elders of the house-churches. But what seems decisive is that when Paul calls together the elders of Ephesus to meet him on his last journey to Jerusalem he addressed them all

1. Titus 1:5.



indiscriminately as bishops.<sup>1</sup> The position is further obscured by the doubt whether the term *episcopos* connotes a rank or a function, but that doubt is common to all the terms connected with the early Christian ministry.

The fact remains that very soon the title did designate a specific office. The development, if development it was, would be hastened by a number of practical considerations. Paramount among them would be the need for someone to preside at the Eucharist. Even if the prophets were sometimes allowed to lead in the prayers, as the *Didache* suggests,<sup>2</sup> in days when every member attended the one Eucharist and all made their communion, careful organization would be needed to maintain order. If there was a presiding elder's chair, as we know there was, someone must have sat in it. Sometimes it would be an apostle or an apostolic man, at others it would be someone who 'had the pre-eminence' among the elders. It would be something of a miracle if he did not soon assume the exclusive title of *episcopos*.

Such organization must have been greatly expedited after the shock of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Not only was the Jewish centre destroyed but the Christian also. The Christians had already asserted their freedom from Jewish obligations: their natural tendency was now to set up new centres wherever their expansion warranted such development. They no longer had just one headquarters: there were new but smaller centres set up in the main parts of the Empire, in Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, Alexandria. The natural tendency in these places would be for the town churches to model themselves on the pattern of Jerusalem. The place of James would be taken by some apostolic man or by a leading man among the presiding elders of the house-churches. In view of this likelihood it has actually been said that it is easier to demonstrate the ancestry of the archbishop or metropolitan than that of the diocesan bishop. But if the above sketch of the probable development is accepted, it is not difficult to see the original bishop as what we should now call the rector or vicar of the house-church.

If it seems odd that there should be bishops who fulfilled comparatively minor functions, it should be remembered that we

1. Acts 20:28.

2. X:7.

know of many such in country districts. These were the *chor-episcopoi*, who were very plentiful in Asia Minor during the fourth century, and seem to have acted in a subordinate capacity, very much as do the modern suffragan bishops. There was a decided reaction against them when they appeared to wish to extend their authority. Their functions and their numbers were severely restricted, and the Council of Laodicea, held in the latter part of the fourth century, wishing to preserve the dignity of the episcopate, ordered that no more bishops should be appointed to small villages.

With this adjustment in our ideas of relative importance we can more easily understand how the presiding elder of the house-church became the bishop and how the head of a town community became the archbishop or metropolitan. The precise details do not matter. The important thing is to realize the great emphasis laid by all leaders from the apostles onwards upon the importance of order, continuity, and authority. It is true that the bishops were in no way isolated from the community. They were not a body of officials exercising autocratic control over an organization that they had themselves brought into being. Such a conception is entirely contrary to the genius of the early Church. It is not even enough to say, as is sometimes said, that the bishops were always surrounded by their body of elders and never acted without them. The fact is that the whole Church, with the chief Shepherd and Bishop, Christ, at its head, was regarded as focused in miniature in each local church. Even when Ignatius says in effect that, where the bishop is, there is the Church and there is Christ,<sup>1</sup> the emphasis is not upon the individual but first upon the local church and then upon the whole Body of Christ. The ministry may be the skeleton, but the flesh and blood and its vitality are provided by Christ and his members. The whole world-wide, universal, Catholic Church is fully present in all its life and power in each local church. It is as an essential part of this body and its structure that the bishops derive and exercise their special authority as representing the Father.

1. 'Wheresoever the bishop appears, there let the people be, even as wheresoever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church'. *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, chapter 8.



How this authority was originally conferred has been a matter of some discussion. Was it by a mere succession of office, or was there also a tactual transmission of grace and authority by the laying on of hands? The latter is universally recognized today as the proper 'outward sign' of the sacrament of ordination. It is suggested that if on any occasion it were intermitted the succession would be broken. The question is an academic one. It is true that for the period before records were kept we cannot actually prove every instance. Nevertheless as this picturesque action was the normal way of conferring and confirming authority in Judaism even before the Christian Church came into being, and as we know that this was the normal method in the Christian Church as far as our records go, there is no reason to suspect that the custom was ever pretermitted. In Alexandria there is a story that they even went so far as to lay the hands of the dead Archbishop on the head of the person appointed to be his successor. However that may be, there is no doubt about the importance attached by the early Church to the ministerial succession. That is clear at least as early as Clement of Rome *c.* A.D. 96, and is made a main point in his defence against the Gnostics by Irenaeus *c.* A.D. 185.

A further question has been raised about the work these bishops were intended to perform. What was their precise duty? The suggestion has been made that their function was merely that of ordaining: it was their simple duty to see that the ministry was continued. Such a 'queen bee' view of episcopacy seems somewhat naïve, but it has at least this to be said for it, that the function of handing on the ministry and maintaining its succession is the one function the bishops never lost. There have been times, as for instance in the old Irish church, when the bishops' importance in the general organization of the Church was somewhat obscured. But so long as a due succession of ministers was felt to be necessary, there had to be someone to maintain it, and that was the primary duty of the bishop. However, in addition to that he has almost always from the first had a general duty of superintendence. Indeed the word *episcopus* actually means superintendent or overseer. Further the bishop had the duty of maintaining the unity of the Church by keeping his own local church

in touch with its neighbours. The correspondence between them went through his hands, as we learn from *The Shepherd of Hermas*, written towards the end of the first century. Again, the bishop was the officer responsible for discipline. This duty expanded until in the fifth century, after the establishment of the Church in the Roman Empire, the bishop began to be recognized as a judge in civil as well as ecclesiastical law. Further, the bishop had the duty of teaching and maintaining the faith. He was the guardian of Christian doctrine. In the early days he himself prepared the catechumens for baptism, and it was his teaching that was condensed into a creed. The great ecumenical councils were gatherings of bishops, and it was through the comparison of the creeds of some of the leading figures among them that the Nicene Creed was eventually accepted as the official *symbolum* for the whole Church. But most important of all, the bishop had the duty of presiding at the Eucharist. It was in that service that the Church was most intensely the Church, the gathering of the faithful as the Body of Christ. Of course he was not alone – he had the elders around him – but he was the presiding celebrant. Thus it was made clear that the bishop was no mere disciplinary or business official but the father of the family, leading his children into the presence of the Father in Heaven.

It may be thought that in the foregoing discussion, while tracing the origin of the bishop and the priest, we have forgotten the deacon. Is he not to be found in the Seven, who according to Acts 6 were appointed to relieve the Twelve of the duty of administering the daily rations for the widows? The answer is as uncertain as in the other questions relating to the early history of the ministry. We gather that there were deacons in close attendance on the bishops in quite early days, since the letter to the Philippians is addressed to 'the bishops and deacons', and a similar close association of the two offices is to be found in early Christian literature outside the New Testament. But the origins are made obscure by the fact that, as is also the case with the terms 'bishop' and 'presbyter', we do not know how soon the name began to designate a particular office or rank. Just as 'bishop' might originally apply to anyone who was acting as a supervisor,



and 'presbyter' or 'priest' to any elderly person, so 'deacon' might apply to anyone who was rendering a service to or for another. In that sense every office or duty, whether permanent or temporary, was a 'diaconate'. It does however seem certain that both in the Great Synagogue or Sanhedrin as well as in the local synagogues the Jews had a recognized body of 'young men' who relieved the elders of some of the inevitable chores. In accordance therefore with our general argument that the Christian ministry was based upon the Jewish, it would be natural to think of the Christian deacons taking the place of the Jewish 'young men' (cf. Acts 5:6, 10.)

What then of the Seven? The traditional view is that this was the first official appointment of real deacons in the Christian Church. The difficulties are that they do not seem to be particularly young men and that, although their original business was to 'serve tables', they soon seem to be taking the lead as evangelists and missionaries. The more common view now held is that they were an unique phenomenon in Christian history. They were appointed to meet a specific crisis, and once that crisis had passed no successors were set aside to take their places as they fell vacant. It is however quite unlike St Luke's style to devote so much space to an occurrence that was of merely passing importance. An alternative theory suggests that in making the Seven the Twelve were in fact setting up the only office beside their own that existed in the Church as a whole, apart from the local churches. Within this 'undifferentiated ministry' the functions of both bishop and deacon would be exercised until as a matter of convenience they were recognized as belonging to two different grades or ranks of ministry. For this ingenious theory there is little or no evidence. It would seem to be at least paradoxical to derive the office of superintendent from a body appointed solely for assistance. In any case the theory seems gratuitous when we have all that is necessary for the origins of the Christian ministry already in the constitution of the synagogue.

That indeed is the conclusion to which one comes after much consideration of this complicated issue. The simplest solution seems to be the best. In the synagogue you have president, elders, young men: in the church you have bishop (or presiding

elder), presbyters and deacons. What more natural than that, as the Church expanded and the early apostles began to pass away, this local organization should itself be extended to set the norm for the whole Church? It would derive from apostolic appointment and the sense of mission would permeate the whole ministry from the bishop, who *ex hypothesi* succeeded to the apostle, downwards. But the most important difference from the synagogue would be that the whole ministry would recognize that it was exercising no independent office but that all was from and in Christ. Jesus was still the chief shepherd and bishop of the whole people of God: it was only 'in him', as using the power and authority they derived from him and acting as far as was possible for human beings in his place, that each rank of the ministry exercised its office.

On the whole the evidence of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament appears to bear out the view of the history here taken. That very enigmatic document, the *Didache*, whose date is uncertain but which some scholars now tend to place as early as the close of the first century, appears to describe a transition period during which the itinerant and 'charismatic' ministry of apostles and prophets is giving way to the settled ministry of bishops and deacons. The latter pair, it says, are worthy of respect, 'for they too render you the service of prophets and teachers.'<sup>1</sup> At the same time, since there is no specific mention of elders it looks as if they are identifiable with the bishops.

If the *Didache* seems anxious to establish the local ministry of bishops and deacons, much the same can be said of the first Epistle of Clement, which was sent from the church of Rome to the church of Corinth about the same period. The writer says that the Apostles knew that there would be strife over the title of the bishop's office and therefore not only appointed their own successors but also gave them instructions that they in their turn should appoint others. It is not right therefore when such men have been duly appointed with the consent of the whole Church and have worked faithfully that anyone should presume to turn them out of office. We have already drawn attention to the great

1. *Didache*, XV. 1, 2.



emphasis laid in this writing upon the importance of what we now call 'apostolic succession'. What should also be noticed is that the local officers mentioned are 'bishops and deacons'. Again we notice the omission of elders, but still, as in the *Didache*, apostles are in the background, and it looks as if trouble has arisen over the assumption, as they die out, of their office by local bishops duly appointed by them or their successors. The gap between the apostle and the diocesan bishop is thus seen to be closing.<sup>1</sup>

The gap has practically disappeared in the letters of Ignatius Bishop of Antioch written on his way to martyrdom in Rome about A.D. 115. Here the three orders of bishop, priest, and deacon are all clearly mentioned, and almost extravagant emphasis is laid on the bishop as the centre of unity against the corrosive effect of persecution. 'All of you follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbyterate as the apostles; and respect the deacons as the commandment of God.'<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the elders are now quite distinct from the bishop. He stands above, and is compared to the Father, while the group of elders is compared to the Twelve. Is there here some reminiscence of apostolic appointment of elders before the bishop or president had begun to take their place? In any case we have here the clear emergence of the diocesan or 'monarchical' episcopate.

If Ignatius saw in the bishop the great bulwark against the effect of persecution, Irenaeus, c. A.D. 180, saw in him the defence against heresy. Indeed, he was the centre of the defensive system of the Catholic Church, comprising creed, canon of scripture, and ministry. The peculiar strength of the bishop lay in his succession from the apostles. He, if anybody, would know precisely what the apostolic teaching was. It was no good the Gnostics or any other teachers saying that they had some specially secret teaching because the only genuine apostolic tradition was to be found in the apostolic sees and was in the hands of their successors.<sup>3</sup> 'One must obey the presbyters who are in the

1. See especially I Clement 42 and 44.

2. Ignatius, Smyrnaeans 8. Cf. Magnesians 6, Trallians 2, 3, Philadelphians 4, 7.

3. Cf. Irenaeus, *Apostolic Preaching* §§ 3, 98.

Church – those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles and together with succession to the episcopate have received the sure gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father'.<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus thus tied up knowledge of the true tradition with the succession to the episcopate and the bishop's succession with that of the presbyterate. With the writings of Irenaeus it is generally agreed, even by those who cannot find the Catholic system in the New Testament, that the era of the Catholic Church has begun.

1. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV:26:2. Cf. III:2:2, III:3:1, 2, 3.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *Tradition*

THE Church is sometimes asserted to be the oldest of the existing institutions of mankind. In any case a society that has lasted for close on two thousand years must inevitably have built up for itself a whole life of thought and custom, a regular ethos, that can never have been reduced completely and accurately to writing. One can no more get to the heart of the Church by the study of its documents than one can get an intimate knowledge of a language without ever hearing it spoken. There are shades and overtones of sound and meaning, a balance and emphasis, an accent whether in speech or life that can only be communicated directly from person to person.

This means that in the case of the Church, which claims to touch every aspect of life and thought, there is a considerable overplus outside all that is to be found in Bible, Prayer Book, Canons, and the works of learned theologians. The life of the Christian Church is a complete culture. It is the solemn duty and highest privilege of each generation to hand on to its successor the rich endowment it has itself received. This has been so ever since the first beginning of the Church: personal contact and communication have always been the main instruments of evangelization. What is thus handed on, as well as the act of handing on, is known as tradition. It is in the former sense that we use the word here.

Even within this restricted field the term is capable of various uses. It may be employed in a neutral, a bad, or a good sense. The verb from which it is derived means not so much 'handing down' as 'handing over': in fact it is sometimes translated in the New Testament by the neutral term 'deliver', which may denote a good or bad action according to circumstances. Thus Judas undertakes to deliver or hand over Jesus to his enemies,<sup>1</sup> while St Paul can speak of handing over or delivering a sinner

1. Matt. 26:15.

to Satan.<sup>1</sup> Similarly to hand on the practice of ceremonies or the observance of certain laws may be bad or good according as the ceremonies or laws are themselves bad or good. So St Paul speaks of being zealous for the 'traditions' of his fathers without reflecting for the moment whether such traditions were reprehensible or not.<sup>2</sup>

A definitely bad sense begins to be associated with tradition when emphasis is laid upon its human origin as distinct from the revelation of God. Thus St Paul equates 'human tradition' with 'philosophy and vain deceit'.<sup>3</sup> Evil tradition was not confined to the Gentile world. Just as bad a sense was attached to the many rules and regulations with which the commentators had overbalanced the law of Moses. 'Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?' asked the Pharisees of Jesus, only to be met by the retort, 'Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?'<sup>4</sup> In later controversies Christian apologists were wont to let this pejorative sense of tradition spread to cover the whole Jewish law as contrasted with the gospel.

If the meaning of tradition as associated with the Old Testament thus suffered, a better sense was attached to it in connexion with the New. There it consisted of God's revelation of himself through Christ as delivered to the apostles. That tradition indeed the apostles regarded as their prime duty to hand on to their converts who in their turn were exhorted to hold it fast without pollution. So St Paul says, 'Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. . . . Keep away from any brother who is living . . . not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.'<sup>5</sup> Or again, 'I commend you because you . . . maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.'<sup>6</sup>

In the primitive Church there was thus no prejudice against tradition as such. Indeed, how could there be? In days before the canon of the New Testament was compiled, there could be no other source of knowledge as to the acts and sayings of Christ. Moreover Christianity was a life to be lived: the knowledge of

1. 1 Cor. 5:5.

2. Gal. 1:14.

3. Col. 2:8.

4. Matt. 15:2, 3.

5. 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6.

6. 1 Cor. 11:2.



its ways, its thought, its culture had to be handed on. All this was part of the tradition. Inevitably in the early days there was some doubt and some confusion. It was therefore necessary to have reliable guides as to what was the right tradition. Special importance was naturally attached to the authority of the apostles themselves. As they had been in personal contact with Christ and had enjoyed the privilege of being actually taught by him, it was felt that they, if anyone, would know exactly who he was and what he had said. St Paul, who was the last person in the world to minimize his own direct contact with God, had no hesitation in affirming that, as he numbered himself among the apostles, so he had entered into this apostolic tradition, which he regarded as coming itself from the Lord. So he speaks even of such practical details as the method of celebrating the Eucharist, 'I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed...' <sup>1</sup> thus identifying the source of the tradition as Jesus himself.

Paul was probably one of the first to embody parts of this tradition in writing. It was done spasmodically and almost accidentally as the need arose, not in formal treatises but in correspondence. The fact that his letters were read at the normal church gatherings gave them a special importance, which ultimately invited comparison with that of the Old Testament scriptures that were also read publicly on such occasions. In the meantime, others began making a permanent record of the stories of Jesus, which circulated orally among the churches. Our present gospels were built upon these accounts, and some of them at least were probably intended to be read as formal lessons in the church services. The books that ultimately formed our New Testament canon embodied what was taken to be the official version of the apostolic tradition and were chosen largely because they were believed to be of apostolic *provenance*. Thus we have the tradition gradually crystallizing in written form within the pages of what was later to be known as the New Testament.

But the oral tradition was not therefore discarded. It continued side by side with the developing canon of the New Testament. It embodied itself in other forms, no less important than the New

1. 1 Cor. 11:23.

Testament itself. It was to be found in the growth of credal forms defining the faith. It was guarded by the carefully preserved succession of ministers, particularly the bishops. It expressed itself in the progressively intensified solidity of church life and practice, beginning from the new rule of Sunday observance and all that that involved. All this began to be known, though only slowly, as 'tradition' in contrast with the written word. There was no conflict between them. In fact the written documents were there to prove the truth of the tradition. By the same token, if anyone wished to publish new and unauthorized stories about Jesus or impose some interpretation on his words or person that had no apostolic sanction, such doubtful material could be checked by reference to the documents. The writings set a standard by which even the rule of faith could be judged.

It was of the utmost importance to see that no innovations should destroy the original character of Christian faith and life. Two attempts of the kind were made in the second century, and either might have been fatal if it had not been for the strength of the tradition, written and oral. The first was that of Gnosticism, a kind of theosophy which would have dissolved all the concrete facts of Christianity in a vague, mythical pseudo-science, substituting an alleged esoteric knowledge for the rule of faith. Against the Gnostics the canon of Scripture was set up, reinforced by the creed and the security of the tradition to be found in the great apostolic sees.

The other attempt was that of Montanism, which claimed to have received a special revelation from the Holy Spirit superseding that received by the apostles from Jesus Christ. Against the Montanists the Church began to close its canon and to insist that whatever revelation had been received was already contained within the officially recognized books of Scripture.

Orthodoxy, or right thinking, thus established itself as the attitude of mind that accepted tradition and Bible as reinforcing each other. This did not mean, of course, an end of every question. The facts upon which the Christian religion was founded were stated clearly enough in the New Testament, and there was not likely to be much dispute about them. The interpretation of them, however, might give rise to many different opinions, and



here tradition was bound to be an important guide. During the first two centuries it was easy and natural to appeal, as Irenaeus did, to the witness of the great apostolic sees, particularly Rome and Alexandria. But the further one got from the times of the apostles and the more the definition of the Christian faith developed, the less force would there be in this appeal. Some additional criteria had to be found to keep tradition itself on the right lines. We have already seen how important was the succession of the ministry in this respect. Other regulative forces were found in the rule of faith, the creeds, and later the councils. Indeed, so determinative were the first two already deemed to be that Tertullian (*c.* A.D. 200) in his *Prescription of Heretics*<sup>1</sup> made a famous attempt to deny to those who did not accept them any right of appeal to the Scriptures at all. 'For where you find the true Christian creed and faith, there will be found the truth of Scripture and of its interpretation and of all Christian tradition.'

The rule of faith was a reasoned condensation of the diffused teaching of the apostolic Church. As has been already pointed out, that teaching can be found in the New Testament, but it is a mere pious fiction that one can go to the Bible and derive the creed straight from its pages. Assuredly no one ever did so as an actual fact. The faith can be 'proved' from the Bible but it has always been taught by the Church. It is indeed a prime duty of the 'beloved community' to provide for its members a chart for the voyage through the highly diversified seas of the scriptures. That chart was the rule of faith. The rule itself took shape gradually under the need to instruct candidates for baptism, to guard them against false teaching and to make sure that they understood the principles of the religion they were entering. The main points of the rule are given quite clearly by Irenaeus (*c.* A.D. 185) in various passages as centring in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The rule undoubtedly covered much more than bare belief in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and would embrace the whole round of common faith and practice, as can be seen from the bishops' catechetical lectures still left to us. In due course there

arose a custom of demanding a short summary of what had been taught from the candidate before the actual baptism took place. It also followed the threefold form and was in effect a condensation of the rule of faith short enough to be easily remembered.

In the meantime, a still more concise statement was being built up on the threefold baptismal formula as given in the last verse of St Matthew's gospel. This was something different from the form of question and answer which was used, as the person being baptized made a thrice repeated contact with the water. At some date before the baptism the bishop would have delivered to the candidate the *symbolum* or watchword. It was a brief summary in what we now know as a credal form of the teaching given during the preparation classes. Just before the baptism or at an early stage of the rite itself, the candidate was expected to repeat this formula, which he would have learned by heart. The earliest example of such a 'declaratory' creed known to us comes from Rome, and is recognized by scholars as the Old Roman Creed. It follows the threefold structure of the baptismal formula but already shows a considerable expansion of the second article, no doubt in an effort to withstand the corrosive effect of Gnostic and Adoptionist heresies on the doctrine of the person of Christ. It may well belong to the period of Pope Victor (A.D. 189-197). In a slightly more elaborate form it is known to us as the Apostles' Creed, a title which does not mean nowadays that the apostles wrote it but that it contains the apostles' teaching. It has always been a specifically western creed: it has no official standing among the Eastern Orthodox.

The easterns, as is natural, are much more attached to the creed which they were so largely responsible in creating, that which we know as the Nicene Creed and which is now used in the Eucharist by East and West alike. Its formation brings us to the age of the Ecumenical Councils, whose decisions we noticed above as one of the main standards for the regulation of tradition. We have already seen how these councils were originally summoned because of the need experienced by the Roman Empire, once it had accepted Christianity, to have a unified Church to help consolidate its secular unity. Heresy threatened to divide the Church against itself, and so the bishops were called from the far



corners of the earth to decide what was the correct apostolic doctrine. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum* – the whole world can't very well be wrong. It was felt that, if the whole Christian world could speak its mind, difficult questions would be answered, doubts would be set at rest and unity would be maintained.

Things did not turn out quite like that, but at least after a century and a quarter of argument and a vast number of gatherings, the Church emerged with a definite creed and a clear statement of doctrine about the person of Christ. Hitherto the bishops had been accustomed to expand and adapt the creed each to the needs of his own particular diocese. Now, when their own orthodoxy was in question, they had severally produced as witness to their teaching the *symbolum* they were wont to hand to their own catechumens. As was natural in the east, these creeds showed much more intellectual subtlety and curiosity than the western formula. Indeed the bishops at Nicea (A.D. 325) were not able to agree upon a formula calculated to guarantee their own orthodoxy without taking a term from current philosophy (*homoousios* – of the same substance). This they used to describe the relation between the Father and the Son. The term was certainly not in the Scriptures or in the apostolic tradition, but it was deemed the only term that could accurately describe the connexion of Father and Son as set forth in the scriptures and the tradition. It therefore guarded the scriptural and apostolic truth, and that is why we still repeat the phrase 'of one substance with the Father'. Thus the creed which we call 'Nicene' and use in the Eucharist was originally a test-creed for bishops.

There is no need to follow the subsequent history through the maze of councils which carried on the discussion through the most amazing period of theological debate the world has ever known. If the council of Nicaea established the relation of the Son to the Father, the subsequent councils endeavoured to establish the relation of the two natures of godhead and manhood within the Person of the Son. Seven of them (including that of Nicaea already mentioned), have since been widely reckoned as 'ecumenical' in the sense that they represented the whole world-wide Church and reached doctrinal conclusions of universal obligation. The Anglican Communion however reckons only four

as attaining to this standard – Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451).

The importance of this acceptance of the Ecumenical Councils is that it serves to fix the tradition at a time when the Church was still undivided and still had an opportunity of world-wide consultation. It thus appears as a practical application of the test of catholicity proposed by Vincent of Lérins in the first half of the fifth century: '*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*' ('what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all'), a test which it is obviously impossible to apply exactly but nevertheless points the way to a proper understanding of what may legitimately be required of church members. In any case, the more strict application of the canon applies only to the doctrine established at the councils and not to their disciplinary regulations. Rome, for instance, has never accepted the order of precedence between the great sees with the reasons given as laid down by Chalcedon (451), nor does the Church of England observe the rule laid down by Nicaea (325) that diocesan bishops should not be translated from one see to another.

Nor is it strictly true that the *whole* Church ever accepted the judgement even of the first four general councils. In the east, small national churches that would not support the dominance of Constantinople broke away, and justified their defection by adopting one or other of the views deemed heretical as touching the Person of Christ. However, as far as Europe is concerned, it is roughly true that during the Middle Ages tradition and scripture were accepted as equally determinative of the Church's doctrine. This did not mean that tradition continued to stand just where it did in the fifth century. Popular religious belief added a good deal of pious opinion to the body of Christian truth as then taught, and a number of the new beliefs received the respectable backing of responsible theologians. The process was justified on the ground that the doctrines thus added were not new but merely explanations and definitions of what had been long held.

In one of its many aspects the Reformation was a revolt against the doctrinal accretions of this later tradition. Chillingworth's declaration, 'The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of



Protestants', was at once a repudiation of what he regarded as the variety of conflicting views in the Roman Church and an assertion that everything legitimate could be found in the Bible. Against this view can be set the statement of the Council of Trent in 1546 that scripture and tradition were to be held as of equal authority.

In actual practice it may appear that to the Roman Catholic tradition is of more immediate importance than scripture. At any rate the three doctrines that have been made official dogmas in modern times, Papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, and the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin, are much more easily learned from ecclesiastical pronouncement than from the reading of the Bible. In view of these pronouncements the old popular argument that 'Rome never changes' has been replaced by an argument from development that owes a good deal to Newman. It is still, however, important for an infallible society to know at what point the development can be fixed and the tendency now appears to be to regard the pronouncement of the current Pope to be absolutely decisive, at least for his own period of office. This would be in line with the saying attributed to Pius IX, 'I am tradition.'

This means that in the Roman view Christian tradition is still a living and growing thing. It contrasts rather sharply with the common Anglican view that authoritative tradition did not develop any further after the close of the fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451).

It contrasts still more sharply with the view of the churches of the Reformation that tradition has no place in the regulation of Christian doctrine at all. The fact is that the term 'tradition' has had a somewhat sinister sound in the ears of evangelical Christians for at least four centuries. Today, however, it has experienced a measure of rehabilitation. But with a difference. German scholars have applied it with increasing frequency, and the use has become common form among theologians, to the general interpretation during the apostolic period of Christian faith and practice. The Apostolic Tradition is the mind of the Church of the first century about the revelation it believed itself to have received from God through Christ, of which the apostles were

in a special sense the guardians. The New Testament itself, as well as the original cult and institutions of Christianity, was a reflection of that tradition. This, however, does not put tradition above the scriptures or even on an equality with them. Just because tradition lived and grew it was capable of deformation. The early stage once crystallized in the scriptures remained for ever a standard by which any future development could be valued and checked.

It must be fairly obvious that tradition, whether it is officially recognized or not, is bound to develop in connexion with any long-lived society. The reason why the evangelical and catholic traditions in the Church have grown so far apart is that for four centuries the various sections of Christendom have had no common meeting-ground. In particular no truly ecumenical councils have been possible. It is much to be hoped that under the guidance of Providence steps will one day be taken to call together such a gathering.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, some slight adumbration of such a procedure is to be seen in the conferences called at Amsterdam and Evanston by the World Council of Churches, although from them the half of the Christian world represented by the Roman Catholic Church was absent. That half of Christendom has had its own councils beginning with that of Trent (1545-63). For the future, since tradition continues to grow, it is well that we should struggle to apply to it, as best we can, the threefold test of (a) conformity to the Scriptures, (b) accordance with fundamental Christian principles, and (c) justification at the bar of reason.

1. At the time of writing it is not clear to whom Pope John XXIII will address invitations to share in the Ecumenical Council which he is about to summon. It seems hardly likely that the council will be Ecumenical in the full sense in which the term is here employed.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *The Way of Salvation*

BEFORE we close this book we must make a final attempt to see what effect the Church is expected to have on the life of its individual members. We have tried throughout not to get lost in a wealth of historical or dogmatic detail. We have indeed tried to make some estimate of the Church's place in society, both past and present, and we have tried to consider the place occupied by the Church in the whole conception of religion. Such consideration was an essential part of our task. But religion is in one necessary aspect an individual affair. What happens in history or in the empyrean must have its echo in the heart of the single person and make its response there, or it is nothing.

This may be put dramatically by asking: What has the little church round the corner to do with me or for me? What is its claim on me or for the matter of that on the people who support it? Presumably it does not just stand there alone: it represents a greater whole. It is obviously a voluntary organization, depending on the goodwill of its members. What is its appeal to them? What does it do or say that makes them consider the time, money, energy devoted to the support of its activities not wasted but well-spent? Above all, what difference can it make to them individually whether they go there and share in these activities or not?

Some of the answers to these and suchlike questions will have appeared in the foregoing chapters. We should like to devote this last chapter to an effort to make clear what is the precise assertion of the Church, what is the precise message that it brings, what in other words is its plan of salvation. Of course all this is well known. It would be impossible after two thousand years of preaching to say anything new about it. But the commonest things in life are so often taken for granted that we fail to see them clearly. We need a special effort to clear our sight and to recognize them for what they are.

This is certainly true in the sphere of religion. As it is the commonest of all interests apart from those concerned with the mere physical effort of living, so it is the most subject to distortion and misunderstanding. This failure is not due entirely to the fact that there is wide difference of emphasis, especially in the teaching of Christianity, but because the general public is too often satisfied that it has learnt all that is necessary or valuable in religion during the period of childhood, and therefore needs no further information. The result is that many who may be thoroughly sophisticated in every other respect remain quite infantile where the most serious of all matters is concerned. No doubt they might allege that if we believe in revelation we should recognize that what God has once said, he has said once and for all, and that if you have heard it once you should have heard it for always. But the answer to that is that what God has said is so profound that while it speaks intelligibly to babes, it still holds unplumbed depths for the greatest thinkers of all time. Besides, each generation needs to interpret to itself age-old truths in the terms of its own day: otherwise even the most vital knowledge becomes stale, boring, and ineffective.

There is then good reason why we should make a fresh effort to restate the Church's message and give an outline to its plan of salvation. To do this at all adequately it is necessary to remember that, as we have seen, the Christian faith is rooted in history. There have, indeed, been attempts to avoid the uncertainty inherent in historic proof by claiming that the dogmatic and practical system of the Church is quite capable of standing on its own without any support from history. Thus the Roman Catholic modernists, who were condemned as heretical in the nineteenth century, claimed that the machinery of Catholicism had proved its efficacy in the salvation of souls, that in any case it was value rather than fact that was of primary importance in the spiritual sphere, and that therefore one could practise one's religion quite happily without any concern whether its historical claims were justified or not. More recently some teachers of psychology and practising psychiatrists have adopted much the same attitude. They find that religious belief brings a certain security, stability, release, and quiet of mind to their patients;



and they say in effect, 'Why bother about the truth of historical claims if their effect is so plainly beneficial?' We have also reminded ourselves in a previous chapter that today, when secular historians are so divided about the exact aims and capacities of their special studies, historians of religious beliefs have warned us against too much reliance on the support of history in order to prove our case.

In spite of all those doubts and warnings we still feel satisfied that the judgement of history is by and large reliable, at least in the sphere of fact and event. We have therefore no hesitation in presenting the Church's version of God's dealing with mankind in its historical form.

Not that the story begins in time. It begins in eternity, before time was and before creation had been set in train. It shows us God living in the bliss of heaven. It pictures him in the highest terms we know, those of personality. But it pictures him as a being so rich, so complex, that he cannot be limited within the terms of a single person as can a human being. He must be conceived as a multiple personality, as three Persons in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three are not to be thought of as separate individuals: they coinhere and act together, though each has his own sphere of operation. The Father is fount of Godhead: the Son is his Logos, thought, reason, or word, begotten eternally of the Father: and the Holy Spirit is the love, power, wisdom proceeding from the Father and the Son. Each of these is not just an attribute or quality of a single personality but they are present in such unique degree and quality that they can be described as themselves being each no less than a person. And yet the three Persons act together always as one only God.

This attempt to describe the ineffable serves to show the poverty of human language. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite, nor can the creature understand the Creator. Yet we must make some attempt to express the inexpressible, and this is the best after many centuries of cogitation, carried out, as we believe, under guidance from heaven itself, that our human nature can do.

One reason that makes this complex picture of the Deity necessary is that we believe his nature to be love. Love cannot feed

upon itself: it cannot be subject without an object. There must therefore be within the Eternal room for subject and object as well. So God is described not as a simple person, but as a society of persons who are one in essential being and activity; that is, mutually reciprocating love.

Since this was the nature and character of God from all eternity, it was out of it that the created universe came into existence. Although in his tri-personal being sufficient for himself, as an act of pure grace and from the overflowing plenitude of his love, he would form a multitude of creatures capable of sharing with him his eternity of bliss. To have that capacity they must in some genuine respect be like him. They must share his character. It was this necessity that dictated the form creation took. Beings capable of sharing God's happiness must be made 'in his image', otherwise they could not even begin to understand or appreciate his ways. No mere robot or automaton would do. They must at least be capable of thought, affection, will: they must possess personality: they must have a mind of their own.

Out of this necessity was to spring both the glory and the tragedy of man's existence. But even apart from the subsequent history we must realize how great a condescension was demanded on the part of God by the very fact of creation. It not only involved a certain self-limitation of his infinitude through the calling into existence of space and time. It also entailed a further and more severe limitation through the setting up of other independent wills alongside his own. We sometimes speak as if the first evidence of God's condescension came at a later stage in universal history. We should remember how great an evidence of it was given at the very outset of the human story.

If men had always submitted their will to the will of God; if they had always remembered the duty of obedience; if they had always recognized the truth contained in the line, 'Our wills are ours to make them thine'; then no doubt the universe could have been planned on other lines than it is. We may imagine that it could have been framed as a perpetual Garden of Eden, where there was no terror in nature, where animals and men lived happily together, where no men preyed upon each other, and where man walked in familiar intercourse with God.



But God in his omniscience knew that men, once endowed with freedom of will, would use that freedom for their own selfish purpose, and would turn it against him. This would inevitably mean that a foreign element, sin, would enter into human life and would poison its springs so that everything, man himself and all he touched, would be affected by it. Consequently the universe, instead of being a paradise for sinless creatures must be a training ground in which sinful men could work out the poison and acquire that character for which they were originally intended and which alone would enable them to enjoy the eternity of bliss that God had laid up in store for them.

So creation, when it came, was such as we know it, a hard school in which man is put to a severe discipline, but in which he is given many incentives to learn. It is a world in which there are floods, famines, earthquakes, disease, and death, 'where but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despair.' But it is also a world in which there is beauty, goodness and truth, skill and heroism, knowledge and imagination, to lift us from despondency and dispel all cynicism. It is a land, in other words, in which man is taught to refuse the evil and to choose the good, and so to acquire the character which has always been God's intention for him.

That, we take it, or something very like it, is the meaning behind the highly pictorial story in the early chapters of Genesis. In any case, and however we may try to explain it, we know that the universe is as it is, and that man's nature is prone not only to sorrow but also to evil. We have to ask how each, nature and man, may be able to help the other in accomplishing for both that perfection which was the original intention of God.

The Old Testament, which the Church has always regarded as authoritative in this respect, has no difficulty in seeing God constantly at work alike in his universe and in the affairs of men. Just as 'the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork', so history reveals his influence and guidance. Indeed it is in his mighty acts that God is most clearly known. The Old Testament shows us how God dealt in pre-Christian times with the question of the redemption of mankind. This interpretation of history is mostly the work of the great

prophets and their disciples. They took the events of secular history and showed how they were used and over-ruled by God for the accomplishment of his purposes.

The writers have no doubt that there is a pattern in history and that the pattern is imposed by God, the guide of all history. This pattern comes out perhaps most clearly in the book of Judges, where we repeatedly find the same kind of formula giving a framework to the life of each particular judge in turn. A tribe of Israel sins and forsakes God; for her punishment and reform she is allowed to fall under the destructive dominance of some heathen neighbour; in her distress she turns to God who raises up a 'saviour' for her and delivers her from her enemies; then follows a period of peace during which Israel forgets the past, grows slack, begins to sin again and forsakes God. From that point the cycle is repeated.

On a larger scale this represents the fate, not of single tribes, but of the whole nation of Israel. Many were the efforts to sum up adequately the religious importance of the history of the people. There is a fine example in 'Moses's Song' as given in Deuteronomy 32. Other examples are to be found in the Psalms, such as 105, 106, 107. Later, in the earliest Christian times, it seems to have been almost a commonplace with the mission preachers to devote a large part of their discourse to describing how God had dealt with Israel in the old days. This they did in order to establish their contention that the proper continuation of Israel's history was to be seen in the Christian Church and no longer in the Jewish nation. Thus St Stephen gives an elaborate account of Jewish history from this point of view in his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7). It was in much the same style that St Paul preached his sermon before the synagogue at Antioch as described in Acts 13.

The main idea at the back of this interpretation of history is that God, wishing to give man every opportunity to find a way out of the difficulties into which his recalcitrance had led him, pursued his purpose by the method of selection or 'election'. He chose one nation, that of the Jews, to be his special agents in working out his plans for mankind. He made a 'covenant' or agreement with Abraham and renewed it later with Moses. Under



the terms of this covenant Jehovah took the Israelite people, the descendants of Abraham, under his special protection and promised to make them a blessing to the whole world – on the condition that they for their part would serve him faithfully as their only God. The Israelites' obligation extended to the careful keeping of a law, both ritual and moral, which they believed Jehovah had communicated to them. Included in this law was the necessity for circumcision, by which every male child of the Hebrews was to be initiated into the covenant at eight days old.

The idea of the covenant is extremely important and was in fact quite fundamental to Jewish religion. This does not mean that every Jew or even the nation as a whole was always faithful to it. In fact the general faithlessness of man and his readiness to fall away from God can hardly be better illustrated than from the tendency of the Hebrews to forsake the God of the covenant and to worship other gods. Today we perhaps understand better than we used to do the temptations to which they were liable. It is practically certain, for instance, that when the tribes settled together in Canaan their religion had much in common with that of the people already inhabiting the country. Their fault lay in not responding more readily and steadfastly to the leading of the prophets and teachers who stressed the sole divine majesty of Jehovah and the moral quality of his demands.

The prophets and teachers saw in the disasters that attended the history of Israel God's severe discipline of his people for their failure to maintain faith with him. Yet the covenant remained sure, and God would never let it completely fail. Jewish writers could point to the great deliverance from Egypt, and later to the equally surprising deliverance from Babylon, as examples of the way in which God preserved his people for the execution of his purposes. Out of this situation grew a confidence that God would always deliver his people and an expectation that he would one day restore its fortunes to the condition of the Garden of Eden, or at least to those that prevailed under their great king David. How this was to be accomplished was never quite clear; there were numerous suggestions; among which was an expectation that there would be an individual agent, a representative Israelite, who would act as Messiah or the anointed of the Lord, and

would take the lead in this expected restoration. Inevitably, many thought of this restoration in the most material terms, but there were others who achieved a more spiritual conception, and at least one, the great Prophet of the Exile, who thought that the new age would be ushered in not by feats of arms but by the vicarious suffering of the agent selected by God,<sup>1</sup> whether that agent proved to be an individual or a group within the nation or even the nation as a whole.

The Old Testament history closes on a note of incompleteness. God had a great purpose for his people, but its accomplishment was not yet. To the modern reader there is about it, as perhaps there was to the contemporary readers, an atmosphere of expectancy.

At any rate, that is certainly so with the beginning of the New Testament and the appearance of John the Baptist, the leader of the last great reformation in Judaism. He announced that the Messianic Age, the Kingdom of God, was 'at hand', imminent, looming over the horizon. He told all who were willing to listen to him that the right way to prepare for it was by a moral readjustment of their lives, and he told those who were willing so to prepare to signify their determination by being baptized as a symbol of their repentance and the washing away of their sins.

In the event, as the Church teaches and as Christians believe, John proved a true prophet. God, who had exercised so much patience with his recalcitrant people, now took a final step. He sent to them his Son. The method was that of incarnation. The Eternal Logos, Word or Reason of God, took human nature of the Virgin Mary in order that through it he might express, as completely as it could be expressed in human terms, the nature of the Godhead. Besides revealing God he would redeem men, delivering them, even at the cost to his own human nature of intensest suffering and of death itself, from their bondage to sin and Satan.

The work of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, can thus, as we have already seen, be divided into two parts, revelation and redemption. By his teaching and by his manner of life as well as by his death Jesus enabled people to see what God is

1. See especially Isa. 53.



really like. This knowledge was of so startling and vitalizing a kind that once it was perceived, it set them free from the phobias and psychological disabilities of their times.

But while this process of revelation was proceeding the work of redemption was going on in another fashion. Jesus himself explained that he had come to 'ransom' his people from their sins. The price he paid was expended in his suffering and death. He who committed no sin, suffered the disabilities that were the consequences of sin. By putting himself within the power of men and suffering the consequences of their rebellion in his own death he exposed the full horror of sin and paid its penalty. Vicarious suffering could go no further. But its result was that the atonement had been effected. The barriers between God and man, that man himself had erected by his sin, had been broken by man's representative and could now be surmounted by everyone who was willing to yield allegiance to Christ. Everything that needed to be done on the scale of history, or in the sphere of abstract justice, or by way of example had been done. It remained to apply the benefits of the universal work of Christ to the individual soul.

Provision for this need was found in the situation Jesus himself had already established before his death. He had started a fellowship among his followers and he had arranged in the meal he took with them for a perpetual memorial of his passion. Some people find this difficult to believe, but surely it would be much less credible that one who had shown such devotion to the cause of humanity should make no provision at all for their welfare in the time, however short or long, that was to elapse after his departure from this visible world until his promised return. In any case the records, as we have them, show him quite deliberately originating a New Covenant, a new testament, a new dispensation, a new stage in God's dealing with man. This New Covenant he inaugurated on the occasion of his last meal with his disciples. 'This is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.'<sup>1</sup>

Of this new dispensation the Church itself was a conspicuous feature. It was, as we have seen, intended to carry on the work

1. Luke 22:20. Cf. Mark 14:24, Matt. 26:28, 1 Cor. 11:25.

of Christ and apply it to the individual soul. It was to be his body, the instrument by which his personality would continue to be expressed in the world of every day. It continued to exercise the authority he had expressly given to his disciples, not merely to make the necessary arrangements for day-to-day affairs ('whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven') but also to exercise moral discipline over his avowed followers ('whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained').

This 'mystical union betwixt Christ and his Church' is further displayed and maintained by the sacraments. The gift of the Spirit of Christ is conferred upon every member at his initiation. The fact that we have now commonly divided that rite into several parts to suit different stages in the Christian's growth and development should not disguise from us the fact that every member is expected to display the presence of the Spirit in his effective standard of living, and that that Spirit is given to him from the outset as a Christian, adapting himself no doubt to the needs of each stage in the development of personal growth or duty, but available in the required measure for every moment of Christian life.

The union of Christ with the individual soul is cemented in the Eucharist, the continuation of the Last Supper, which is to be a perpetual reminder of the Lord's death until he comes again. This links us with the Christ in his passion and carries us into the heart of his self-sacrifice, which is expected to have its echo in our daily conduct. In uniting us with him it also unites us with one another, so that it becomes the great sacrament of unity. As the special act of Christian worship and thanksgiving it lifts us up into the company of angels and archangels singing their eternal praises round the throne of God in heaven. In so doing it casts a halo of joy around even the most trying of earth's circumstances, and colours every detail of Christian living.

All this does not mean that the religion of the Church and of the individual Christian is a mere matter of ceremonies. On the contrary, it has an intensely moral foundation. There is a whole inner attitude of mind without which none of the promised grace can become effective. Jesus would only perform his miracles



where there was faith. So the sacraments will only be effective influence to bear on personalities that display their position proper to receive them. The person who does not believe in Christ cannot expect to receive the benefit of Christian sacraments. To believe in him implies acceptance of his moral standards. The unrepentant sinner places an obstacle between himself and the grace of a forgiving God. 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'<sup>1</sup>

The fact is that there is a psychological as well as an ontological element in the Christian life. The New Testament apparently sees no opposition between the two statements: 'Believe and thou shalt be saved'<sup>2</sup> and 'Be baptized and wash away thy sins'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it can without any sense of incongruity run the two together. So the Corinthians 'believed and were baptized'.<sup>4</sup> It is only in modern times that we have set faith and sacraments, psychology and ontology against each other and learnt to speak as if one must necessarily exclude the other.

Yet there is a close similarity between their aims. He who emphasizes the psychological side wants all the historical processes of redemption, the atonement, the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, the reconciliation with God, to be true for *him*, and this can only be so if they remain no mere events of history but are in some sense reproduced in himself. Similarly, the one who emphasizes the sacraments does not think of them as events merely exterior to himself; he thinks of them as bringing into intimate contact with his own personality the incarnate Son of God with all the incidents of his earthly life and his present risen power. In other words, what both stand for is incorporation into Christ or union with Christ. Though they might not express it in those terms what they both desire is, as the second epistle of St Peter puts it, that they may be made partakers of the divine nature.<sup>5</sup> In the way of salvation as proclaimed by the historic Church of Christ both types of thought are united. Children of Christian parents are baptized in infancy and are expected to show as they grow up a gradually awakening understanding of, and faith in, the creeds and sacraments in which they are trained.

1. John 14:15.

2. Acts 16:31.

3. Acts 22:16.

4. Acts 18:8.

5. 2 Peter 1:4.

way they will need, like others who have never heard If they, an awakening, a conversion, a change of mind. But that the goe some mere convulsive movement of rejection of an wil. It will involve a continual turning towards the light and constant absorption of its beneficent rays. In this continual port the sacraments can be the greatest possible help, making far easier than it would otherwise be for the faithful Christian to realize his growing union with his Maker.

'This is the way, walk ye in it.' The Church, as St Augustine so often reminds us in his *City of God*, is merely a pilgrim here upon earth. She knows that the way leads to a goal. As each one of her individual members has his own earthly end in death; so the whole world heads towards the conclusion of all history, graphically described in the Bible as the Day of Judgement.

In recent years a great deal of attention has been paid to the 'eschatological' significance of the Church. Critics regard her preoccupation with the end as an unhealthy sign of otherworldliness. Her own members, with greater insight, recognize that it is precisely her attention to the end that lends its comparative importance to what happens in this world of space and time. It is the objective that makes the journey important.

In this respect it is of fundamental significance that the immediate goal is a judgement, a final judgement in which the sole standard will be that of moral value. This is the portal to everything that lies beyond the gate through which everyone must inevitably pass. It means of course that, if we would be justified at this bar, its standard must rule our lives while on this earth. We must measure our common actions by the same rule: we must judge ourselves daily that we be not adversely judged at the 'last day'. In the scriptures that day is described to us in obviously pictorial terms, but the very vividness of the picture brings home to us the intense seriousness of the need to place moral qualities in the forefront of our aims.

The pictorial element in scriptural teaching is maintained when descriptions are given of what is to happen after the Judgement. Actually the pictures vary; and each writer has his own way of picturing the ultimate future, often being satisfied with merely giving a little Christian colour to outlines drawn from



the speculations of the contemporary world. It is useless to look for any precise chart of the land beyond the grave. Indeed, Jesus himself seems to have been at pains to warn his hearers against undue curiosity on the subject. We are told however that God's original covenant will be fulfilled. The conditions of Eden will be restored on a spiritual plane and the faithful will enjoy the intimacy of God's presence in illimitable joy for ever.

What will be the future of the wicked is not so clear. Some measure of punishment is certainly indicated, and the intensity of the suffering they must endure is vividly, even luridly, described. But whether it issues in everlasting torture or sheer annihilation is not disclosed. Some Biblical passages suggest the one and some the other. There are even indications that the punishment will be found in the last resort to be remedial, having the effect of leading the delinquent voluntarily to repent and to choose the good. Thus 'good may be the final goal of ill' and every soul that has ever been created may be united with its Creator. St Peter in his sermon to the people in Solomon's Porch<sup>1</sup> speaks of a 'restitution of all things', and it may be that he had in mind some such ultimate fulfilment of the original purpose of God.

This is speaking in general terms. Of the course allotted to the individual member of the Church we are given much more certain indications. He who is by faith and sacrament united to Christ has already entered into a new life. At his baptism he died with Christ to sin and rose with him to a more vital and a morally better existence. This does not mean that he is no longer subject to temptation, but that he has new powers of resistance, a larger hope and a wider interest, and that sin has no compulsive power over him.

This union with Christ is to be taken quite seriously: it is no pious figure of speech. There really is an ontological change. Christ indwells the Christian personality in such a way that, while the individual's mind, affections, will remain his own, he is conscious of new incentive and new powers. He does not boast of heightened virtue; he recognizes humbly that his part is merely to give the utmost possible opportunity to the indwelling Christ

1. Acts 3:21.

to speak and work through him, until he can say with St Paul, 'It is no longer I that live but Christ that liveth in me.'

As sin cannot hold him, so neither can death. Christianity has no hard and fast teaching about the immortality of the soul, although some sections of the Church maintain it strongly. We do not know whether 'soul-stuff' is indestructible or not, but we do know that those who are united with Christ cannot die eternally. At least that is a fundamental element of our faith. The new life that the Christian enjoys now in virtue of his union with Christ is nothing less than life eternal, and it will continue beyond the grave and gate of death. Those who are united with Christ cannot die, but are ushered into the visible presence of their Lord, to enjoy his fellowship for ever.

This is the way of salvation, the message that it is the duty and privilege of the Church to deliver. It is not suggested that every part of the Church gives it with the same balance of emphasis or is content with such an outline without making some subtractions or additions. But roughly that is what every local church from the smallest mission-hut to the grandest basilica exists to maintain. It is this that is the source of all the practical work of charity on the part of the Church throughout the twenty centuries of her history, as briefly noted in the early chapters of this book. It is the essential good news that the Son of God became incarnate for our salvation and that the salvation may by faith be made effective in every individual case.

Of course it is not easily credible : it is difficult to suppose that the whole vast system of the universe, which astronomers are only now beginning to disclose in all its immensity, should exist for the furtherance of this particular scheme. But before rejecting it we should ask ourselves whether there is any more easily credible alternative. Are we to fall back on blind chance ? Is there no purpose at all in this vast universal system with its amazing possibilities? Is it essentially idiotic, as all meaninglessness and purposelessness must be? Or is there some evil and devilish purpose in it which has never been fully disclosed but which leers at us in the common and private disasters that pursue our course on earth? We must choose somewhere. If the Christian view is



right, no acceptance will be forced on us: we must be free to make our mistakes; it is part of our training to learn to exercise our own judgement. Yet the Christian scheme has at least this to be said for it, that it gives a worthy explanation of our human situation. It is most consonant with the dignity of man; it calls for the best that is in him; and it offers the grandest hope for the future both of the race and of the individual.

The Church whose duty it is to proclaim and guard this way of salvation suffers from the same apparent defects as the scheme itself. It is not altogether obvious; its mission and history are capable of quite unflattering explanation; it is weak and divided; it is often inefficient, and sometimes in some parts it seems downright bad. Yet it has done more for the world and for civilization than any other single institution. It has strengthened the weak, guided the erring, reformed the criminal, healed the sick, taught the ignorant, relieved the poor for nearly twenty centuries. Above all it has performed, with varying zeal and success, its primary function of making God known and keeping his children in touch with him to his glory and their own eternal welfare. Again we must make our choice, and we must make it freely. If we can find anything more worthy of our time and attention, then let us by all means devote ourselves to it. But if we conclude that this organization is of God, that this is the Body of Christ, that this is none other but the house of God and the gate of heaven, let us act upon our faith and give our adherence wholly to it.

No ecclesiastical historian can write without pride in his Church. But combined with his pride there must be a certain element of humility. The reason for this modesty has been well described by a modern writer<sup>1</sup>: speaking particularly for the Anglican, he says this quality

shows itself as an instinct, a consistent tendency to rely more upon the silent, steady, cumulative, and anonymous pressure of a whole community, exercised persistently over centuries, than upon the heroic but momentary exertion of a very few supremely great saints. It is upon the saints in common life, who cannot be canonized because they cannot be known, and upon the cumulative

1. R. Lloyd, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. I, p. 4.

préssure upon society of tens of thousands of parochial communities and mission stations, that the Anglican Church has always placed its main reliance for the discharge before God of its responsibilities all over the world.

*Ex uno disce omnes.* In this respect at least the Anglican Communion is not peculiar. The Kalendar of Saints contains some of the greatest names in history, but the essential saving work of the Church down the ages has been done through the instrumentality of the Beloved Community as a whole.

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